

First Steps Family Survey

Total Surveys mailed out: 3,328

Total Surveys returned: 1400

1. How old is your child?

168 (12.00%)	383 (27.36%)	767 (54.79%)	80 (5.71%)	2 (0.14%)
Less than one year	1 yr - less than 2 yrs	2 yrs - less than 3 yrs	3 years and over	Did not answer

2. When did your child begin receiving First Steps services?

657 (46.93%)	377 (26.93%)	310 (22.14%)	1 (0.07%)	55 (3.93%)
Less than one year	1 yr - less than 2 yrs	2 yrs - less than 3 yrs	3 years and over	Did not answer / did not know

4: What is the basis of your child's eligibility for First Steps? (Check one*)

46 (3.29%) Autism	198 (14.14%) Medical Condition	25 (1.79%) Visual Impairment/Blind
10 (0.71%) Deaf	82 (5.86%) Multiple Disabilities	152 (10.86%) Very Low Birth Weight
374 (26.71%) Developmental Delay	33 (2.36%) Orthopedic Impairment	10 (0.71%) Not Sure
31 (2.21%) Hard of Hearing	431 (30.79%) Speech/Language Impairment	8 (0.71%) Did not answer

354 (25.29%) *Chose more than one eligibility

5. It was easy to learn about First Steps, to find out if my child was eligible for services, and to obtain the early intervention services that are needed for my child and family.

455 (32.50%)	688 (49.14%)	169 (12.07%)	63 (4.50%)	10 (0.71%)	8 (0.57%)	7 (0.50%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

6. When my child was first evaluated, all concerns about my child's development raised by me and others were addressed.

672 (48.00%)	672 (48.00%)	23 (1.64%)	10 (0.71%)	8 (0.57%)	12 (0.86%)	3 (0.21%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

7. The results of my child's assessments or evaluations were explained to me in ways I understood.

643 (45.93%)	700 (50.00%)	25 (1.79%)	6 (0.43%)	2 (0.14%)	11 (0.79%)	13 (0.93%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

8. I feel the service coordinator and the early intervention providers listen to me and respect me.

829 (59.21%)	518 (37.00%)	27 (1.93%)	10 (0.71%)	4 (0.29%)	0 (0.00%)	12 (0.86%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

9. I received information and explanations about our family's legal rights (such as due process, procedural safeguards).

609 (43.50%)	586 (41.86%)	70 (5.00%)	18 (1.29%)	78 (5.57%)	28 (2.00%)	11 (0.79%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

10. In creating our Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP), I am asked about areas where our family felt things are fine and where we felt we need help.

748 (53.43%)	594 (42.43%)	12 (0.86%)	5 (0.36%)	18 (1.29%)	9 (0.64%)	14 (1.00%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

11. Our family routinely uses the help of our service coordinator.

305 (21.79%)	655 (46.79%)	275 (19.64%)	51 (3.64%)	34 (2.43%)	61 (4.36%)	19 (1.36%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

12. Our service coordinator helps my family, in a timely way, get the services we need.

576 (41.14%)	607 (43.36%)	91 (6.50%)	34 (2.43%)	31 (2.21%)	45 (3.21%)	16 (1.14%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

13. Since being part of First Steps, I know how to work with professionals and advocate for what my child needs.

529 (37.79%)	687 (49.07%)	75 (5.36%)	13 (0.93%)	39 (2.79%)	42 (3.00%)	15 (1.07%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

14. We receive all the services listed in our Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP).

676 (48.29%)	582 (41.57%)	43 (3.07%)	8 (0.57%)	59 (4.21%)	14 (1.00%)	18 (1.29%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

15. The people who work with my child know a lot about my child's disability and how to work with him/her.

766 (54.71%)	547 (39.07%)	46 (3.29%)	6 (0.43%)	9 (0.64%)	8 (0.57%)	18 (1.29%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

16. Early intervention services give my family ways to improve my child's development.

886 (63.29%)	469 (33.50%)	15 (1.07%)	1 (0.07%)	7 (0.50%)	9 (0.64%)	13 (0.93%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

17. I receive information and explanations about the services my child needs and believe the services my child and family receive are appropriate.

707 (50.50%)	611 (43.64%)	52 (3.71%)	8 (0.57%)	5 (0.36%)	3 (0.21%)	14 (1.00%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

18. Early intervention services staff show respect for my family's ethnic and cultural background.

636 (45.43%)	485 (34.64%)	6 (0.43%)	4 (0.29%)	13 (0.93%)	245 (17.50%)	11 (0.79%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

19. The early intervention services in my family's Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) have a significant impact in my child's development.

759 (54.21%)	521 (37.21%)	32 (2.29%)	2 (0.14%)	45 (3.21%)	25 (1.79%)	16 (1.14%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

20. The information and help my family receive through First Steps has made our family better off.

783 (55.93%)	509 (36.36%)	28 (2.00%)	6 (0.43%)	38 (2.71%)	21 (1.50%)	15 (1.07%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

21. The ability of our family to work and play together as a family is pretty normal even though we have a child with special needs.

805 (57.50%)	459 (32.79%)	31 (2.21%)	6 (0.43%)	12 (0.86%)	75 (5.36%)	12 (0.86%)
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I Do Not Know	Does Not Apply	Did not answer

First Steps Family Survey 2004

Note: Comments are typed as written on the surveys with the exception of the correction of most misspellings. Names and other personally identifiable information of children, families and providers have been redacted.

None at this time.

Everyone was wonderful.

Have service providers deliver therapies in a group setting without the parent having to enroll and pay for a daycare classroom, i.e., group speech services. Just wanted to mention our service coordinator has been beyond outstanding! We love her.

The First Steps agency we worked with did an exceptional job for us! How can you improve perfection? You can't!

Physical therapy while my caregiver is at my home. She fails to call me, which she says she will, after each visit to update me.

Our child has been helped so much by these services. I can't imagine our lives without this early intervention.

Everyone in this process has been wonderful and outstanding. I hope that First Steps in our area is recognized for the hard work with the children. Thank you.

I feel First Steps is a wonderful program. Without them, I would not know all that I have learned about my child. They have helped me be the mother I want to be! Thank you so much.

Require the service provider to show proof that they were actually working with the child (parent signatures). This way the state can be sure that providers are not trying to get paid for services they don't do. I speak from experience.

I don't know where we'd be without First Steps! Thank you!

We love what you have done for our family and child.

We have only met with our service coordinator once since January 15, 2004. We had some problems about a month or so ago and called her, which she somewhat handled. But, we have not heard from her since.

First Steps is a great program! It has helped our little boy so much! Thank you.

More effective communication between therapist and service coordinator.

Need to have, "Somewhat Agree," on survey.

The First Steps program has helped me connect and educate myself about my son's speech/language disability therapy. Most important to me was finding out about other resources available to help my child with speech.

The service coordinators we have had in the past did not do anything unless I called and requested something. I called several times before someone updated my child's IFSP. Then, that was the only time we met or even heard from a service coordinator. They never initiated any communication. We've had several through the Regional Center. When I contacted one coordinator, he did his best to find the information I needed. But, I was told that the service coordinator should contact me. They should have an active role in my child's services. I was not happy with the lack of communication with these service coordinators from the Regional Center, so I contacted an independent service coordinator. Since the change, I have been more than happy with service coordination.

The response time could be better as far as getting back copies of evaluations, etc., and the speed of getting services started.

As far as me and my family are concerned the First Steps program is incredible. I feel it will get even better as my daughter gets older and shows more progress. Thank you.

Thank you!

Beginning the First Steps process took a ridiculous amount of time and it was a long time before our child actually received services.

When my child needed help, her pediatrician directed me toward an agency which works with children with disabilities who then directed me to First Steps. I wonder if the pediatrician didn't have information on First Steps? Maybe they should have literature and phone numbers.

I feel it is too early in the process for me to fill out this survey, as we just got into First Steps.

We came into the system when the Regional Center was still involved. I was not at all impressed with the service the Regional Center or the service coordinator provided. Since we changed to a coordinator that works as an individual, things have been much better. She is involved with us and remains current on our child's progress. There needs to be more providers to chose from.

On question #5, the first part asks if it was easy to find First Steps. It was nerve-racking! But, it was well worth it!

Have not had much contact with service coordinator recently.

It was extremely irritating to have to wait so long for the first interview with my child to see if she was eligible. This short survey could have been done over the phone quicker than her having to go to everyone's home for it. Most of the therapists I contacted from the list never called me back (except one about a week later to tell me she was booked). I had to get my Parents As Teachers educator involved. She made a call and I immediately was set up with someone. It was months from the start of this process until therapy started.

I think advertisements for First Steps would allow parents the opportunity to know that there is help out there for a child with delays. I found out about First Steps from the speech and language therapist that evaluated my son. Before then, I didn't know anything about First Steps.

Great program! More information needs to be available for people to find out about it. My Parents as Teachers people told me, "She cannot receive services until she's three years old. There isn't anything available for younger kids."

Very pleased with First Steps. Will recommend to anyone who has a disabled infant or toddler. Thank you.

With my experience, I have felt that therapists with more experience seem to do a much better job with my son with his physical and mental needs. The young ones, I feel, don't have the sensitivity and empathy needed.

My child was first seen at birth by hospital employees at the Craniofacial Clinic. We made several trips to the hospital during the first six months of the child's life. I was never once told about the First Steps program by anyone at the hospital - including social workers, doctors, nurses, specialists, etc. Because I still had concerns about my child's health/development, I went to a different hospital to seek answers. Immediately, the staff there gave me information on First Steps. Thank you. Please try to ensure First Steps program information is disseminated to all local children's hospitals. I was very stunned to find out the program existed; but not from hospital staff where I had been for six months! I had been to developmental pediatricians, EEG department, social workers, etc. They really missed the boat with our family!

First Steps is the best program for any family with a disability. THANK GOD for people who care! I didn't even know where to begin until one lady referred me and my son to the First Steps program. Then, from there, I understood everything about his disability and how there was help for a child with disabilities. I and my son love First Steps. We would not know where to begin without them. They are there with you 24/7. I wouldn't have had any help if it wasn't for First Steps!

#12 - We've only needed her once. When she finally returned my call, two weeks had already passed and I had taken care of the problem myself. She is currently working on a new issue and, so far, things are going well. The only other area I was a little frustrated with was the amount of time it took to get my daughter's IFSP finished and get services started. I started trying to contact First Steps in April and therapy wasn't started until August! Fortunately, my daughter didn't have severe needs and was discharged at the one-year evaluation. If she did really need the therapy, this "time issue" could have been a real problem. Regardless of the time issues to begin therapy, we had a great experience with our therapist and received very valuable information. We looked forward to every visit and really miss the visits now that we've been discharged.

I appreciate the social worker coming to us at the hospital and getting us hooked up right away. So, that means First Steps is doing a great job getting involved ASAP when the biggest impact is made. I appreciate my caseworker. She is very caring, consistent, and persistent in making sure our child gets her services and things she needs as quickly and as easily as possible. We have enjoyed the social parties (picnics and christmas parties) very much! Thank you.

The speech services my daughter receives are excellent. Our service coordinator has done very little. Additionally, it took several months from our initial meeting with the intake coordinator until services began.

This program has helped my son more than you know. Thank you.

I know why the child was started. I don't know where to find out.

The only comment or suggestion I have is that you don't have enough physical therapists for my area. It was extremely difficult to find a physical therapist.

The process of credentialing is going to severely limit the number of experienced providers in the rural areas due to time, money, and lack of good reimbursement for First Steps.

Thank you very much.

I'm very happy with our speech therapist. She is doing a fantastic job with my child.

A million thanks to all of your staff!

The first First Steps program we contacted took nine months before they were ever going to start services for my child. Where we currently live, it took ONE WEEK! Big difference. All the people that work with my child are wonderful. Thanks.

We were extremely disappointed in the developmental therapist. She cancelled the second visit and never called us back. After we talked to our service coordinator, she contacted the therapist. We found out that she had lied to her about the situation. She said that she had left a message that she was sick and would call us back two or three days later. It was SIX WEEKS before we heard from her. Only AFTER we made three-four complaints to the service coordinator, did she finally reach her. When she talked to her, the therapist told her that she thought we were supposed to call HER. I confronted her and she said, "Oh, I guess I got you confused with someone else." If that is the case, that must mean there are other families she has neglected. At that time, I told her we would not be needing her services anymore. Our service coordinator has been extremely helpful and reliable.

So far, we love First Steps! We don't know what we would do without them.

I feel all families should know about First Steps and go through this program to help their special child.

In early May, our speech therapist quit seeing all of her patients. I will be unable to find someone else to come to our area for six weeks. My service coordinator and I have called all the possibilities. There are none available. That is very disappointing. More help is needed!

Thank you!

Keep up the good work and thank you!

Be sure to check that clients are receiving the services that are being billed to First Steps.

We will be very sorry to lose our service coordinator when changes are made. We are concerned about continuity of care when these changes occur.

Our speech therapist is an amazing professional!

Service coordinators need to do things more timely. Therapists need to be able to start services in a timely fashion rather than wait on authorizations to be processed. Therapists are needed in all sixteen services and must be available!

This is my second child to go through First Steps. I did not really have an understanding until my second child. I have a wonderful service coordinator now. The process is very confusing for new parents primarily because they have to choose the therapists and they have nothing to base this on. Plus, the parents need to be told that they have a right to "fire" any therapists who are not working out. This is a wonderful program. Without it, children would not get the early intervention they need! I am personally grateful we have a First Steps program here!

No improvement needed. Superior organization and caring, capable therapists.

First Steps has changed our child's life. In the last year-and-a-half she has progressed dramatically. We could not have afforded all the wonderful services she has received.

So far, I have had a very positive experience with First Steps. However, it seems as if funding is a big problem and a threat to continuing services. Maybe a "lending" program for big ticket items like swings/trampolines, etc., would keep up with the budget shortfalls. Then, when one family no longer needs an item (like a swing), it could be lent to another family instead of purchasing a second, new swing. I also think it would be nice to have a parent who is already receiving services from First Steps act as a contact/advisor to a new family when they are first getting into the system. It was very overwhelming to be told to pick therapists and coordinators off the Matrix when I had no idea what to look for in the therapist bios. If a more experienced parent had been available to help me select therapists and to educate me a little on what to look for, I probably could have made a more informed decision. I honestly think I got very lucky when I picked the therapists that I did pick, and unfortunately, my choices were barely more than random. I really could have used some guidance when I was going through the Matrix. It was probably the hardest part of the process and the one that was the most frustrating and upsetting because I felt totally alone and yet pressured to make the best choices for my son's future.

My son receives language and occupational therapy services. What a great program. Our family has had only wonderful experiences with all parts of First Steps.

Thank you so much for this program!

GREAT PROGRAM!

My family was aware of developmental delays/concerns with our youngest due to our oldest child's medical diagnosis. It breaks my heart and deeply frightens me that it has become so difficult to qualify for early intervention services. Our children are our future and if they are not able to receive services at a young age, while their minds and bodies are pliable, they will only require more attention and services later in life. One last thing, I would like to commend our service coordinator. Her knowledge of the services, state, and system is incredible. She is extremely organized and punctual. She always maintains a professional demeanor while she listens sincerely and maintains neutrality. First Steps is lucky to have her! One thing I would like to see improved upon is the amount of paperwork in all facets - there's way too much!

Initial eligibility process is too delayed. Initial call was in November. The evaluations were not until the end of June and services began in mid-February. Biased? Our service providers, and those of our friends in the program, were pre-chosen by intake coordinator.

There are not enough services in our area, specifically, for the visually impaired. What services we do receive for her vision are outside the First Steps Matrix. Our service coordinator is a fantastic person to work with. She is caring and sensitive to our needs. She works hard to find us the help we need. I feel like she is practically a member of our family. We love her!

My son is in First Steps now for his speech and is learning sign language. My daughter, who is now out of First Steps due to her age, started at nineteen months and we saw a huge difference in her speech when she turned three. First Steps has been nothing but good for my children and has been a lifesaver in overcoming their speech delay. Thank you.

Our speech therapist is incredible. Her play-based structure has helped our son to speak and have fun while learning. We love her! Her pleasant attitude and care for our son has been amazing!

I am very pleased with First Steps. Everyone that we have worked with is extremely nice, helpful, sincere, and considerate. We're thrilled our son has the opportunity to receive the help he needs. Thank you!

I credit the First Steps program for the progress my daughter has made over the last two years. When faced with devastating news of problems your child has after birth, it's nice to know that an agency will help us every step of her life and guide us in teaching things at a slower pace. Most times that our daughter didn't make continual progress, the therapists reminded us how far we've come. So, they in essence, have helped us, her parents, too! I don't know what we would do without our therapists! They're the best!

My son's service coordinator is excellent! Also, his physical therapist is one of the best! Any recognition possible would be to his physical therapist - she has helped my son tremendously and is a wonderful person!

The way it is set up now with the independent service coordinators works very well and I think it is very unfortunate that the system will soon change. First Steps is a wonderful program. We are so lucky to live in a state that has such a program.

The "awareness factor" of First Steps could be improved. I learned of First Steps and how it worked more through a family friend with a child who has/had developmental issues more than through Parents as Teachers. Perhaps a mailing with Parents as Teachers information when child is born would disseminate/advertise your services earlier and serve as a very helpful aid if issues with the child arise. I have been very happy with our physical therapist. She is wonderful! In doing an occupational therapy assessment/evaluation, I found it difficult to find an occupational therapist that I "clicked with". One was finally found and she was/is great. I wish that somehow there was a better way to help other families find therapists who match and fit them better. With First Steps limited funding (I'm sure), you would be better served by employing therapists who have the child, the families, and First Steps goals as dominant rather than filling their own schedule/funding. My therapists have been great - I just do not want to see such a wonderful public resource exploited for financial gain by unscrupulous employees.

The physical therapy my daughter receives is wonderful. We can see the development and growth in her every day! We are so grateful for the First Steps program! Thank you!

We truly appreciate the service and support we receive.

My overall experience has been super! I have heard some people speak of their difficulties with the First Steps program. I am pleased with the people I have working with me and my son. My only problem has been my ability to locate implementers or therapists for my ABA program. There are none on the Matrix. #5 - It was easy for me because my pediatrician referred me to the program. I had gotten my own comprehensive speech and language evaluation from the hospital before contacting First Steps. This helped to process my eligibility quicker.

Didn't always know all services available to me. We had needs that weren't initially addressed or not told, that with that issue, we could have assistance.

I wish my pediatrician would have told me about First Steps when I voiced my concerns. I had to search it out on my own to learn First Steps even existed.

I would like to comment our service coordinator. She always gets us the help my child needs and even though her caseloads are high, she sees our child consistently. Everyone works together.

To listen to the parents more and to have the therapists write more accurate test results.

First Steps has been a great help for our family. Our service coordinator is great in responding to our children's needs.

While our son was premature, he has not needed an IFSP. It's nice to know though that the resources are available if we need them as he gets older.

Thanks to First Steps, my son went from completely non-verbal to initiating speech (with some two-word phrases) in four months. My only complaint is how difficult it is to qualify for services. Early intervention is working for my son, whose speech delay was enormous, but I wonder about all the other children with delays who don't qualify. Additionally, I wouldn't have known about First Steps if I weren't in Parents As Teachers. Overall, I'm thrilled with the program and our son's success.

We think First Steps is a fabulous program and feel fortunate to have benefited from its services to our children. It made an enormous difference in our children's development!

We have been so thankful to everyone at First Steps. Without their help and guidance we would be lost. Thank you.

This survey came to us with no return address and I was very hesitant about opening the envelope! At the beginning and prior to our first visit with our speech therapist, the paperwork was very repetitive.

I wish information about First Steps were more widely available. My child has a 50% delay in gross motor development, but we never heard of First Steps until after she completed physical therapy. It's possible she might have qualified. Also, before we heard of First Steps, we had already had one speech evaluation that we (and insurance) had to pay for. If we had known about the program earlier, that wouldn't have been necessary. Our pediatrician referred us for all of this, never mentioning First Steps.

Thank you for the First Steps program. It has made a difference in our child's development.

I think more information needs to be given to parents coming through the local hospitals. We know parents who have a daughter with developmental delays due to heart surgery that are not aware of the First Steps program. We were made aware through the social worker and discharge nurse at a children's hospital.

First Steps is a wonderful program. We are new, but feel it is going to help our family in many ways. After one-and-a-half months of therapy we are already seeing big progress. Thank you!

We found out about First Steps from a social worker at the hospital. I would encourage all hospitals to do the same. It would be helpful when the first person that talks to you explained other resources that might help with medical bills for kids with special needs. She did give us MC+, but we didn't qualify because we had insurance. We did not know that the previous three months of bills could have been paid or that SSI or the health department could help out. I have found these resources, but a list of numbers would have been helpful.

About question 20 - our family unit was very strong before we were involved with First Steps.

We love the help and support First Steps has given us. Our child is doing everything a "normal" five-month-old should do. Just a suggestion - maybe someone who can help with emotional aspects. We took it fairly hard when we found out our child was disabled at two weeks old. We were pretty uneducated. Someone to help educate families and the general public would be great.

More service providers.

We have only been involved in the program for two months and so that affected answer #19. Overall, I have been very impressed with the level of professionalism and warmth of both the intake and service coordinators and we are benefiting from the sessions with the speech pathologist. I'm grateful your program is available!

I'd like to keep my service coordinator. She has helped me through two speech therapists, three physical therapists and one occupational therapist. She has been invaluable to me by supporting me when I was reluctant to advocate for my child and to affirm my position and role as parent. She will be leaving in July while our child will be transitioning to the early education program in September. I have come to rely on her help and judgment. We moved here from another state in October 2002. My child was thirteen months old. In our old city, our child had a case coordinator who came to our house once a month. We were assigned a physical therapist, occupational therapist and speech therapist, but we never saw them. Upon moving here, we found it difficult to connect with First Steps. But, once in, I was most impressed by the level of services we received and how all parties seem to work together as a team to help our child overcome his disability. You have a wonderful program and I would strongly resist changes to it. I am grateful we moved to Missouri, if for no other reason, than for the blessing of Missouri's First Steps program. My hats off to your people who designed and run the system, and on a shoe string budget, I'm sure.

Abuse of parental rights and disregard for joint legal custody between divorced parents and insistence on forcing enrollment in school before legally settled between parents has been a big problem. I wish we had never contacted First Steps and instead would have just used the therapists that were suggested directly and paid them for private services and not commit to a school district for our two-and-a-half-year-old at this time. We have contacted an attorney.

Although the service coordinator has done an excellent job lining up services, I feel that her compensation for the actual time spent is excessive. I realize that I am not a demanding parent and feel I help make her job easier.

First Steps has been, not just to my family, but the other family I have, a lot of help. I can see a big help on all we are doing. Thank you.

We have not dealt with our service coordinator very much, but we haven't needed to. Everyone we have had contact with has been great. We have no complaints. My son has been receiving speech and language for about four months and is doing wonderful. Thanks.

The very first meeting I had with the intake and service coordinators and all the therapists was very difficult! I was expected to have a plan for my daughter when I was expecting guidance for her from these professionals who dealt often with our type of situation. I really didn't know at that time what goals were realistic. I thought the meeting was too parent-directed.

Nothing. It's great and a godsend. We are so grateful to First Steps and our coordinator is an angel!

First contacted the program in November 2003, at the Parents As Teachers coordinator's and pediatrician's suggestion. Received confirmation letter in a timely fashion. But, the first contact with the coordinator was well after thirty days and only after my initiative. It took weeks of calls and messages to get in touch with the coordinator.

We had a very difficult time getting into the system. Our area needs more staffing. Our first speech evaluation was awful! The therapist came to our home sick! She was coughing and sneezing and I didn't appreciate that at all. Our child ended up catching her virus. Then she proceeded to evaluate him and was combining assessments to evaluate him. She even mentioned to me that doing that would not get an accurate assessment. She also had never even heard of his medical condition, which has been the root cause of most of his delays. Then, it took over two weeks for her to submit her evaluation. Meanwhile, I spoke with our coordinator about my concerns and she arranged for another evaluation, which was successful. Since our IFSP meeting in January, we couldn't be more happy with the awesome team we have working with our son. Our speech/language pathologist is wonderful and very knowledgeable about his condition. Our occupational therapist has been tremendously helpful and our son is really making great progress. Our service coordinator has really helped us obtain the services we need. I am so grateful for First Steps and our whole team! We had a rough start, but our son has the best team of professionals working with him now and he is flourishing. Thank you.

I am very happy with the help my son has received through First Steps.

Get the word out. I did not know about First Steps until the Parents As Teachers organization referred my son. I am glad we made the connection. Now, instead of being at half his age developmentally, he is only two months behind. As we work with him he continues to improve. If it wasn't for First Steps, my son would not have his helmet or straight feet. The one thing that I think could improve First Steps is getting the word out to new parents and encourage Parents As Teachers to push a little to get the word out. It was because of my son's teacher's (from Parents As Teachers) concern about his head shape that we connected with First Steps. I was told at the hospital when I had my son that he may have developmental problems and that I would need to have him checked in about nine months. They did not tell me who should check him or where to take him. Because of First Steps, I knew what referrals I needed to get him help. If I had gotten the information leaflet about First Steps at the hospital, I would have been able to get my son help sooner. It was almost too late to get him in a helmet to reshape his head. Another month, and surgery would have been the only way to fix it. I am very grateful for the assistance we have received from First Steps and for the education and help in becoming an advocate for my son's needs. Keep on doing the good work. Everyone I have dealt with at First Steps has been kind, courteous and caring, many times answering questions before I had the chance to ask.

When I first contacted First Steps, it took several weeks for us to hear from them. In fact, they never contacted me. I had to keep calling them. This initial process of getting involved in the program should not be so difficult.

First Steps has really helped my daughter improve her speech. I wouldn't change anything about them, except, I wish they could work with her up until school starts.

There are several items that I put a star by due to the fact that they didn't quite apply to our situation. Our son was evaluated around the age of eleven months. There were several ladies who came in and evaluated our son. While they were evaluating, there were times when they would ask me questions. When they would look to my son to perform certain tasks, they would give him a very short amount of time to complete the task, in my opinion. There were also times in which they would comment on things back and forth and that did make me uncomfortable. When the results from my son's evaluation arrived, they came through the mail and no one offered to sit down and discuss all of the findings. We moved in October 2003. Since then we have had nothing to do with First Steps. We have relocated to another state. Due to this fact, I don't feel we were in the program long enough to really know if it was of great benefit to us or not. I think, overall, the idea of First Steps is good for families, but I think there may not be complete follow-through. Before our move in October, we only talked two or three times with our service coordinator including when my son was evaluated. Hopefully, my thoughts and experience were helpful.

Our intake coordinator did everything, going beyond what she was required to do. She was wonderful and she has done all of the work.

We just really appreciate the help First Steps has given our son. He had progressive hearing loss, but with First Steps help, he has had hearing equipment from a very young age and is even talking some. Thank you!

I have been very pleased with my services. My service coordinator is very helpful and informative. My speech therapist is excellent. Thank you so very much!

Since we have just started services, some of the above questions are difficult to answer. I do believe that the intake coordinators are overbooked and this causes delays in receiving services.

My only problem I had with the program was our service coordinator. She did not schedule a six month meeting or would hold them at eight or nine months. She did not always invite the therapists for the meetings. And she would show up at my house on the wrong day, which made me extremely furious. I didn't have any problems with the therapists.

Our service coordinator is great. The therapists also helped explain some things that I did not understand. Thank you.

I believe First Steps is a benefit to my child and I am happy with the progress we have seen.

I love my child's physical therapist. My child has really improved! Services in our home help keep us employed.

I would like to receive, in writing, the suggestions made by the developmental therapist each time she comes so that I can refer to it when working with my child. Sometimes it is hard to remember all I should after she leaves. Our therapist is great to work with.

Our family would not have known about First Steps if it had not been for the information provided by the clinic at the hospital. This is a crucial point of reference to inform parents of First Steps and we are glad our child's doctors were aware of the program and had information on hand to give us. If they had not informed us, I don't know when, if ever, we would have discovered First Steps.

Thank you for providing such a wonderful program for our family. Our son is a completely different boy from last August thanks to First Steps. Please don't ever take this great program away from the kids that need it so deeply. Without First Steps, and its super providers, I'm afraid to think where our son would be today. Thank you!

We have been very pleased with the help provided by First Steps. Thanks!

First Steps has strongly assisted our child with occupational, developmental, behavior disorder, and physical therapy issues. We are still trying to determine how to work with his ADHD issue and how to live a "normal" life.

You all are great! I am so lucky to live in Missouri.

My child is now on par with other children his age. It's incredible how he has advanced in some areas! Thank you!

My family is so fortunate to have the opportunity to work with the First Steps program. This is a top notch program that benefits families in so many ways. I hope funding for this program continues and is never in the threat of loosing state funding. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

I am so very thankful for all of the staff who have been involved with the diagnosis and treatment through First Steps concerning my son. They have all been so respectful, kind, understanding and, most of all, helpful. I thank you!

We love all the therapists that came out and feel that it has helped us a lot.

Speed up the intake process. The initial letter I received after self-referring said I would be contacted in a few days. It took at least two weeks. Evaluation after the intake meeting did not take place until late November and the process started in September. In the final weeks, I had to call daily to insure the process was moving forward. In short, I had to be a jerk in order to move the process. Once a service coordinator was assigned and the interventions began, I was totally satisfied. The intake piece was very frustrating.

Get more people if you need them. This is an important service that helps save time and money in the long run. I waited three to four months before services started. I had to call many times and enlist two people I knew to help me. It was very frustrating. They didn't return calls.

Our service coordinator has been extremely helpful to our family.

Written copies of the evaluation and someone to explain what the evaluation is based upon would be helpful.

I based the answers to these questions on the services provided by our current therapists. The first coordinator and therapist were unacceptable in all areas. Thanks, I can't say enough good things about our current therapists!

Our coordinator is great; as is our provider. But, the procedures for getting implementers on the Matrix were cumbersome and, at times, frustrating.

Need more audiologists closer to home who participate in First Steps. We currently drive 190 miles one way with an infant for hearing aids. That has put a true hardship on our family. Could you please look into this?

We have only been doing speech therapy for two months. So, it's hard to see if it has significantly improved yet. But, it definitely has helped.

Though there are some logistical problems for First Steps, the services provided and equipment available to families is incredibly helpful and necessary to families. Missouri is very fortunate to have a program like First Steps. It should continue for a very long time. We couldn't have done it financially or emotionally had it not been for First Steps.

Thanks everyone for your help. We are so happy to be in this program. Thank you very much!

Without the help of First Steps, our family would have extreme difficulty providing the much needed services we get for our son. We are very grateful!

Overall, I am extremely pleased with our First Steps services. Keep up the excellent work.

Our main issue with First Steps has been that we haven't always had free choice among therapists. When our speech therapist resigned in May 2003, we were told that we could no longer be seen by that therapist because of a non-compete clause in her contract. The owner of the agency refused to allow the therapist to see our son, even though they could not provide our family with another therapist. It did not matter to her at all that our son needed services, or that First Steps has a rule that it is the family's choice in what therapists they chose. Our service coordinator and myself tried for months to find a therapist from any agency in our area. The owner wanted to persuade our family to see someone else from that agency that could only come one time per week for thirty minutes, even though our IFSP called for three times at sixty minutes. We refused. The agency was unable to arrange for our son to have an appropriate therapist until Fall 2003. We only chose to resume therapy with that agency because we didn't have any others to choose from (even though our original therapist still had an opening for him.) I know from speaking with other parents that this is not the only time this situation has happened with this agency. I believe that people like this owner need to be stopped from harming Missouri's special needs children. First Steps is a wonderful program, but DESE needs to know that the system is ineffective for children when they cannot get the services that they need. Please contact me if any of the above information needs clarification. I want to keep others from experiencing the same issues.

I'm very disappointed that First Steps drops a child at the age of three. I feel that age should not be the only factor deciding when the services end!

Therapists (occupational and physical) have been great, courteous, etc. Administration and support staff have been a little less organized.

They could give out more information and explain things better than what they do. They don't hardly give out information about a child's services.

Wonderful, respectful, and patient therapists.

I am, and have been, quite disappointed that our speech pathologist has missed MANY appointments and CHOOSES not to make them up. Also, they are late on most occasions and leaves early often. I have addressed this with little help from our coordinator. I feel my daughter does well when she works with the speech pathologist, but it is so inconsistent that we never gain the much needed momentum to have her start to excel. My daughter is still being treated by First Steps through the summer and I desperately want this resolved.

Our service coordinator is awesome.

Consider reevaluating the "push" toward at-home therapy. Our experience with this type of intervention has been negative and many other families seem burdened by this approach. Parents should not be encouraged to be their child's therapists, and many children function better and get more out of therapy whenever parents and siblings are not present.

I don't know how my child would have ended up without First Steps! Thank you!

Initially, getting in touch with First Steps was very difficult. I called and left several messages and it took about two weeks to get a return phone call from my intake coordinator. I ended up having to get a supervisor involved because it took so long for my calls to be returned. I feel that the expectations of the family are not properly set. I received a letter from First Steps saying that initially they would be in touch with me within the next few days. Basically, I was to receive a call from my intake coordinator in a few days, which I did not and this is when I proceeded to start calling them. This is when the nightmare of not returning phone calls began. What initially was in writing saying that the procedures would start in a few days turned into about a month. My service coordinator and speech therapist are great!

The training modules are a bit confusing. My ABA implementers have had a terrible time getting registered, thus delaying this program.

I have been very pleased with this program. Both with home and group therapy. The only negative thing I can say is that it is hard to find out about. We got the number through our Parents As Teachers in-home teachers when I expressed delays for my child. The doctors don't give out this information. My three year old was attending ECIP at a local school and I still didn't know about First Steps. When I first called the number, I was told about all these forms I would need to fill out that were sent in the mail. I have to admit, it was complex. Then I received a call that they changed this policy and someone would come to my house and do this over a computer. I was thrilled! This change was very helpful. I still think this program needs more exposure. Thank you for all your help!

Answering #5, we only strongly disagree with the fact that it was not easy to learn of First Steps. We came upon the agency by accident. Once we called, the rest was very simple. We are very pleased with our service coordinator and all of the people who work with our twins.

They would not stop when my baby was doing nothing but crying. They just made him madder when they forced him to do things!

Find a way to speed up the process. For our family, it took three months before therapies started. Otherwise, happy with the services.

First Steps has made a big difference in how my child communicates! Thank you.

I wish First Steps continued through age five. I am not looking forward to using the local educational system. Even though, I'm sure that the staff are well-trained, I worry about the child-per-teacher ratio.

Keep the Matrix more up to date. I have called listed providers to find out they are no longer offering services or the organization closed down. Cut down on the paper work by eliminating sending out the information of who you paid to the family receiving services. I am only interested in knowing what and when I'm going to get services. Use that money for paying the service providers.

The enrollment process is a little more than expected. The intake coordinator specialists have too many cases to handle which causes a lot of delays. It is not necessarily their fault, but it is a problem.

The therapist needs to spend the whole hour with the child they are assigned to!

I wish my coordinator would help me communicate with the hospital to help me receive all services my child needs.

I think it would help if hospitals took the time to share with parents about First Steps.

We are very grateful for First Steps.

I did not need much information regarding the program or my child. However, our occupational therapist is wonderful and works well with us. The service coordinator that was assigned to us only came out for the planning meeting and was never heard from again. She should at least call.

The two girls who work with my child (speech and ABA) have been fantastic! The service coordinator did not contact me but one time and that was the night before the transition meeting with the school district. The school system appears to have difficulty communicating with the First Steps program. The transition meeting was not comfortable for me. It did not go smoothly. Pediatricians in our county also need to be made more aware of the First Steps program. I feel my son could have gotten services much earlier if my pediatrician could have registered my concerns with his speech development. She did not feel concerned about it, even at eighteen to twenty four months, when he still wasn't talking. First Steps has been wonderful for my son. The only improvement I would make is to create more AWARENESS of it to enable earlier intervention. We were hooked up by Parents As Teachers, thank goodness! But, had I known about it sooner, I could have gotten him started earlier. Also, the school district needs to work closer with the First Steps program to ensure proper and timely transitions for each child needing help with their delays.

We are so pleased with the help, respect, and understanding of First Steps. Our coordinator calls often to check on my child and our speech therapists are amazing. It is so amazing to see what they have done, so far, for us. Our son can say, "mom" and "dad", and lots of other words now. We love to hear him talk.

My child's development and abilities have greatly improved as a result of First Step's services. Her therapists and our coordinator are very knowledgeable and extremely helpful!

The therapists aren't good about relaying the progress information of my child.

Excellent program! Please keep funding it!

I am so glad that Parents as Teachers found this program for me. I don't think I would have heard of it otherwise.

Need more qualified speech therapists. It is very difficult to locate a speech therapist, because very few have ongoing availability.

The First Steps program has been a great help to my family and has helped my child excel in areas. He still has some delays, but in other areas, he has overcome them with the help he received through his therapists.

We really value our service coordinator since she has so much professional and personal experience with hearing loss! First Steps has been wonderful for our family. Our coordinator is available to us whenever we need her.

There are some questions that I tried to understand. I was trying to pronounce some of the long words.

It would be beneficial if the service coordinator or therapists working with the family would inform the family about specifics of disorder and what the professionals feel is needed and not rely solely on parents to make these decisions. Parents may not know what is needed or when to include other services.

We appreciate your services and the help that they have given our son and us. Thank you!

Very pleased with excellent service.

Thank you so much.

My child was behind developmentally (gross and fine) due to surgeries and a long hospital stay!

Service coordinator and intake coordinator-IFSP should target needs of family more specifically. My son needed developmental therapy but, since I didn't know it was available, he did not receive it until after I became aware of its availability during a developmental evaluation.

Learning a lot from our therapist.

My son's speech therapist is and has been great. I just found out that his service coordinator was supposed to contact us every month and find out how things were going and that has not happened. She is getting paid for something she is not doing.

When we began speech therapy, the first therapist came and evaluated our son. She began throwing out words such as Autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder and Aphasia. My husband and I were completely shocked. My son is a very normal, happy, and social child. Then she told us we needed developmental therapy and she recommended someone. We started working with her only to hear that the two of them work together and are friends. They also work for the same company. After a couple of months, we were told our son would need occupational therapy! Again, we were given names of people from the same company. Finally, our coordinator stepped in and wanted him evaluated by a separate company. We had an occupational therapist come out and she stayed for over two hours evaluating our son. Her final thoughts were, "He is a typical two-year-old with a speech and language delay." Again, she told us numerous times she was not diagnosing, but she really felt he played and acted like any other two-year-old. She felt he did not qualify for occupational therapy. We now have switched speech therapists and stopped developmental therapy for now. I can see that the girls were only trying to "help" each other out and gain more business for each other. I also realize how inappropriate they were for telling us the things they did. They will never understand the months of crying and devastation for nothing. Because of my background, I knew he was not showing signs of Autism, but when it comes to your child, you just want to do the best for them. I thought maybe I was just missing something. Our pediatrician was furious that they would even attempt to try to say he was Autistic. At least now we have our son in much better helping hands! I'm so glad our coordinator stepped in. She is wonderful. I think the First Steps program is a wonderful program for those in need. However, our experience with those therapists was awful. NOBODY should be telling a parent, in the first thirty minutes of knowing them, that their child could be Autistic. Thank you for reading this. Sorry it was so long!

I did not hear about the program until my son was almost three. I think the Parents as Teachers program needs to let parents know of the services as soon as they think there might be a problem.

We have had a difficult time with First Steps having people travel/work in our county. My son was assessed as needing occupational and physical therapy in November 2003. But, as of this date, it has not come to fruition. Our service coordinator expresses that no one wants to travel to this county due to no mileage reimbursement. Thankfully, we have the financial resources to make sure our son receives the services he needs. But, for a family without this luxury, the child is the one who suffers.

The program is doing a good job. It's the therapists that could use some help.

Monitor your early intervention service staff more closely to see that they are responsible in making their appointments with families, arriving promptly for appointments, and calling to make appointments when they say they will.

Try not to schedule an appointment the day before.

I thank God for First Steps and the progress my daughter has made!

It took almost three months from the time my parent educator/doctor called requesting an evaluation to actually receive an evaluation. Other than having to wait a very long time to receive an initial meeting with First Steps, I have been very pleased with the program. Our physical therapist has been wonderful.

I thought my intake coordinator was terrible. I initially called in October of 2003. My IFSP meeting was in March 2004. I had to keep calling her and leaving messages. I feel that she did not do her job; I did it for her. I also spoke with her supervisor who also had a nonchalant attitude. If I had to do it all over again, I would've sought other means for my son.

My children both get along great with their teacher. Thank you very much.

I think speech and occupational therapists should have some type of training in Autism before working with a child with Autism. ABA has been the key in helping my child. All therapists need to spend the agreed amount of time with the child, not talking to the parent about their personal life. I've had two different speech therapists for my child and both would sit and talk to me for fifteen to twenty minutes of my child's sixty minute session.

Only problem was the fact that we live very far out of town and no one wanted to come to the home, so we transport him. Also, one of the providers refused to work with my younger son due to our family filing Due Process back in 2000 for our older child. They said that it was a conflict of interest. She works for our local school district as well as First Steps and I don't feel it was an appropriate way to handle this.

My son has been getting speech therapy for over a year and I have only gotten one progress report. I requested one report every month.

We can't tell you how much we appreciate the services we have received. Everyone we have dealt with has been absolutely wonderful. Thank you so much!

I would like for my child to receive the other services that the doctors have recommended.

My service coordinator is no longer with the program and this survey would be answered differently for my new service coordinator.

Our service coordinator and speech therapist are excellent representatives of the First Steps program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback. We were given the complete "run around" through the qualifying process. It took longer than the 45 days and the SPOE said that we were lucky it was that quick because many have taken a lot longer. Service coordinator has worked very hard for our family. She never gave up on finding an in-home speech/language pathologist for us. We love our providers. The process to qualify was entirely too long, and in my opinion, an overuse of funding. My son had just had an outside evaluation showing a delay and he was put through an entire developmental evaluation when speech/language was the only concern. The pediatrician had faxed information and written a prescription for a speech/language evaluation. There was more than enough information and medical history to warrant assessment and placement into the program. It took numerous phone calls (which I have documented) and constant pushing on my end to get things up and running. The SPOE was new and placed in Hermann and was expected to cover entirely too many families. She never knew what was going on and always answered, "I'll ask at my next meeting," which usually meant another week or two would go by. I wasn't happy that she wrote our first IFSP and "approved" the original services because I felt that she didn't know our family at all. We have a wonderful relationship with our service coordinator and providers and appreciate the services that being in First Steps has allowed us. Work definitely needs to be done at the entry level so you don't lose families by overlooking them due to poor judgment and lack of quality SPOEs.

I appreciate the First Steps program and what it has done for my son.

When we first signed up for First Steps, I think there was some confusion. No therapists had seen my son. It was difficult to plan on IFSP without any therapists input. My son now sees an occupational, developmental, and physical therapist and we had a six month meeting with all therapists and one service coordinator. It was wonderful. Thank you for providing these services for our family!

Communication needs to be better from all of the therapists and the coordinator. I am not always notified when the therapist does not show up. Also, I had some instances where a therapist was to be there for one hour and, instead, was there only twenty to thirty minutes. I released them.

From the beginning, First Step providers have been extremely helpful and supportive for our family. There's no question that my child would not have developed on target without the help of our service coordinator. We are concerned about how the changes in First Steps will affect services for families.

This is such a wonderful program! We are noting progress with our daughter and look forward to more. I would have been at a loss of where to obtain services without the help of First Steps. Thank you!

My son and I enjoy all of our therapists and they all are very nice and explain things very well. We are learning from each other. If I find out something new about this disease, I tell them and they tell me anything they know. They all deserve a big thanks for taking on a child that has a disease that no one seems to know anything about. Thanks to all the therapists. A very special thanks to First Steps. Without your services, my son may have never learned how to walk, feed himself, or talk. Thank you all.

Overall, we were satisfied with the help from First Steps. Our child's problem was not drastic. The help we received showed us how to work with our two-year-old and help him work on his blends in his vocabulary. He still has a difficult time with "pl" and "bl" words.

We have three children that are in, or went through, First Steps. The intake process is not good. The first contact is really hard (i.e. NO calls backs, lost paperwork, etc.). Also, unless you have a network for therapists, it is hit or miss which equals lost time. The learning process for our first child was terrible, and is still, even though he is out of First Steps. He also is the most severe. I feel First Steps will do what I ask as long as I know what to ask for. We now have a wonderful service coordinator and therapist for our third child, but our first child could have benefited from all the time lost. It is a wonderful program and early intervention is the key.

The speech specialist that works with my child is excellent. I believe she does everything possible to assist with his speech delay. As he is an otherwise normal child, I cannot comment on the other services of First Steps because we don't need them. We are very happy with the program. I very much appreciate that Missouri has a program like it! Thank you.

The referral process, paperwork, intake process, and acceptance into the program took us five months. That is too long. The intake coordinators need to have more help.

The service coordinator was very good and she has been very timely in getting approval for actual therapy. It has been slow when getting equipment, but we were not able to tell if that is First Step's fault or the therapist's fault. We are very thankful for First Steps.

I feel like whenever my child has needed a "big dollar item," such as his wheelchair, I have had to fight and justify what I need with my service coordinator even though the therapists agree he needs it.

The getting started process was a little long. Maybe you need more local coordinators.

We had to change our service coordinator because we did not feel we got the help, items, and respect we needed to help our son.

For your information, we do not need service/speech very often, so I don't know if we really apply to this.

I would love to tell someone about my whole experience with First Steps. I called First Steps four or five times at the urging of my Parents As Teachers representative when my child was twelve months old. Our pediatrician called First Steps when my child was eighteen months old. It took seven months, from my first phone call I received from them, to get services started. That seven months could have helped my child a lot! I would call and leave messages and they were never returned! I was told I was caught in the change of First Steps in Spring 2003. That doesn't make me feel better. I felt like I was being avoided. But I kept calling because I will never give up on my child learning to talk. My child will be three on June 29th. They extended her services through August because it took them so long. So they gave me two extra months for the seven months my child missed out on. My child talks like a deaf child. She can only say "m", "n", "1", and vowels. My child is two years and ten months old and can't even say, "DADDY", and "DaDa" is one of the first words for most babies (nor could she at twelve months when I tried to get her started in April). She has finally given me answers as to why my child doesn't talk. My child has a very weak palate. I just would like to see a change in the time frame from when a doctor calls First Steps to start of therapy. That seven months could have made a huge difference in how my child talks today! Thank you.

Without First Steps, our little boy would be so much further behind other children his age. I am so very thankful for the wonderful group of women we are working with. They all have specific areas that should not be "combined." If this happens, you will lose the detailed expertise which we have been fortunate to receive.

First Steps is a great program. The only problem that we encountered was that it took over two months to get the initial evaluation. We really could have used the help sooner. Our child has significantly improved since being seen by the therapist. We are very appreciative of the program.

Thank you for listening to my concerns as a parent. The services we receive through First Steps have dramatically improved how our family relates and the quality of life for my children. Thank you for your outstanding service.

It would be nice to see you try harder to find out what's wrong with him or speed him up. I don't really see a difference.

Our service coordinator had not contacted us for about four months. I was urged by our physical therapist to contact her and get her more involved. That was one to two weeks ago and now our service coordinator is becoming more involved.

My physical therapist and speech therapist are excellent. I'm very lucky to have both of them! This program is great and I've had no problems with anything involving First Steps.

I am so grateful that my son has been able to receive early intervention in his own environment.

My child has made great improvements thanks to the help he has received through the First Steps services!

I have been so happy with the services that all of my son's therapists provide. I feel that our ABA provider is so busy that we are not getting all of the time we need for our son. I feel like he needs to come more often to follow up with our son's implementers so that my son can benefit fully from his therapy. I cannot even begin to say how much help our service coordinator is for us. I can call her and she goes out of her way to help me with whatever I need at the time. She is always on top of everything, she processes our paperwork the day I call and she is always so friendly. Overall, she is concerned with how my son is doing. I am so thankful for the First Steps program. My son is really showing improvements. He still has a long way to go, but you have to start somewhere.

I am disappointed with the length of time it takes to obtain equipment.

The initial assessment was difficult to obtain. I was a "squeaky wheel" and it still took months.

I feel you need to know about an occupational therapist we had to fire. She sprayed some liquid into the air and claimed she wanted to get the "bad energy" out of my child. Since then, I have heard of many families she has done this to. I believe First Steps needs to know about this and someone should keep an eye on this woman. I am COMPLETELY SATISIFIED now with my son's therapists. I call them "the dream team." I want you to know that these three ladies are phenomenal. We are truly blessed. They have brought so much knowledge to the table and are so kind and genuine. My son has shown big improvements since First Steps. Thank you for listening and giving me this opportunity to voice my opinion. Have a great day.

I used my own background to search out and utilize First Steps. I believe this should have been recommended by our Parents as Teachers to start with. First Steps and Parents As Teachers could be a great team in Missouri.

The value of this program to my son and our family cannot be over-emphasized, nor can a dollar amount be ascribed to it. Our speech/language pathologist specifically deserves commendation for all she has done.

Thank you for all your help.

Our son's speech therapist has been a godsend to our family. She has given us information on a myriad of topics that have helped both children.

I used to be a service coordinator for First Steps before I had a premature daughter. We had a bad experience with our first physical therapist. I have found through coordinating First Steps and having a daughter in First Steps that home health care businesses associated with a hospital do not follow First Steps guidelines. As a coordinator, it was hard to get evaluations or progress notes on clients. As a mother, our first physical therapist was with a home health agency associated with a hospital. I never received an evaluation report or progress notes concerning my child. I also felt the agency did not have a clear understanding of First Steps and its processes. I felt that this was a breakdown in communication between what First Steps expected and what the hospital agency was doing or knew to do. I also felt that much of the interactions between family and therapists tend to be very medically focused instead of family-centered. So, you may want to make sure that your therapists associated with a hospital understand the First Steps guidelines and expectations and are following them. If I did not have a service coordination background, I feel that my child would have missed out on the effectiveness of early intervention services. We have a new physical therapist now and we think she is wonderful. She does not work for a hospital and follows First Steps guidelines. Things are going smoothly now.

I want to say thank you to First Steps. My daughter and I really like it. It is helping.

Speech therapist is exceptional. Never got status report from any physical therapist.

Just couldn't get the right help and so we are no longer in the program.

Closer and ongoing evaluation of your service providers needs to be performed. The first speech therapist we had was very inadequate and ill-equipped to help my daughter. Of course, I did not realize the extent of her (the therapist's) inadequacies until we switched to a new therapist who is very well-qualified. I found the initial process of selecting therapists to be overwhelming. I spent a lot of time "networking" with other parents to find qualified therapists. Many other parents had similar bad experiences with some of your service providers resulting in the loss of precious time in terms of their children receiving proper help. Overall, I am thankful for the services provided by First Steps , but there is room for improvement.

First Steps is an excellent program. I'm glad that this service is available for us and our child who needs it.

I do not feel that this is a fair assessment after only six weeks with the program.

Thanks for all of your help. It is working wonders for our daughter!

One of my children has been away from physical therapy for a few months due to no one being able to find physical therapy services for our county. My suggestion is to broaden more services!

Thank you so much for all you've done for both our children!

Make the time between when a child is approved for the program and when therapy actually begins, quicker (within a two-week period instead of a month). Both my children are in the program and it took almost a month before therapy started. Since they were two, it only gives them three to four months in the program, instead of a full year.

We found it very difficult to make the first contact. We left several messages and it took six to eight weeks for a return call. Once we fulfilled the initial phone interview requirements and were "in", the process ran smoothly and services were prompt and professional.

I wish we could add and change services without having to meet with the service coordinator every six months. It seems she could just review by phone. It feels like a lot of bureaucratic red tape. Greatly appreciate the program though!

I am so happy my child has First Steps. She has improved dramatically over the past ten months.

I truly believe First Steps has given my son the best opportunity to develop and to be competitive with today's society. I can't express how thankful I am for this program! I truly believe you have given my son more than I could have given him, without the financial strain! I would have found a way, but thanks to the State of Missouri, early intervention has given him what I probably could not! I wish primary care physicians would listen to parents more. My son might have gotten help sooner if they were more educated on early signs and symptoms. I also want to point out that my son was, for the most part, non-verbal when he started First Steps. Now he talks! He recognizes all upper case letters, knows his numbers 1-10, can sing parts of several songs, and I have bought him his own computer, that he can do by himself! His expressive language is still notably behind his peers. But, his receptive language far exceeds his peers. His behaviors have improved dramatically! Please note that this has all occurred in five months! I now feel that my son may grow up to be a "normal" child! We just have a few bumps in the road! First Steps has given my son a great chance at a more normal life! Thank you First Steps! Thank you State of Missouri!

My child receives three therapies. It was difficult to get going in the beginning. We have been with First Steps less than six months and we have had several changes with therapists, not due to our change, but staff changes. Some of the therapists are not showing results with my child. One in particular, I'm not sure she knows how to work with children. My child is doing fine with her development, but I'm not so sure it is due to the therapy. I just think she's a late starter. I'm glad First Steps is there, but it is less than perfect.

First Steps has helped my kids. But, I wish they would show us the toys and stuff we need to get and where to get them.

Since changing my service coordinator, everything has improved. My child is receiving more help now thanks to our current coordinator.

Good people! Thank you!

Thanks to First Steps, our daughter has made tremendous strides with the help of our/her therapists and service coordinator. Without this program, I don't know where we would be. Thank you Missouri!

This program helps my child.

I would like to see First Steps continue in the near future. Without First Steps, we would have gotten behind on our child's needs to meet the goals and development.

We have a great time with our child's therapists who are fun, friendly, and polite.

Just want to say how thankful I am to be in the program.

We have had a very pleasant experience with First Steps and we feel that our child has improved significantly since she has been involved in First Steps.

Our coordinator has been quite helpful from the very beginning. She has continued to be an advocate for my son and is always very prompt in returning my calls. I strongly support Missouri's early intervention program through First Steps and hope it will continue to help families like ourselves.

When a parent/guardian calls initially to see if his/her child qualifies for services with First Steps, someone should reply to phone calls sooner than sixty-plus days. That's just ridiculous!

As I sit here filling out this survey, I'm listening to my child yelling "Hey". Her speech is coming along. It has been very slow, and at times, frustrating. The First Steps program is helping her so that one day she will communicate clearly and on her own.

I have enjoyed working with our therapist. Her experience and professionalism is wonderful. First Steps has really helped my son improve his language skills.

Our initial phone call to First Steps took place on November 13, 2003. We received a letter from First Steps dated November 15, 2003 which stated that, "You will receive a contact within the next several days in order for arrangements to be made for your first face-to-face visit to begin the intake process with the intake coordinator", but that never happened. By the end of December, we still had not heard from anyone, so we called First Steps again. We left a message for our intake coordinator and she finally returned our call during the second week of January. It then took another two months to schedule the necessary evaluations and meetings. Our child was finally able to begin therapy in the middle of March. Therefore, the whole process took four months, not 45 days as stated in the Missouri First Steps Parental Rights brochure. Apparently, something needs to change. We asked our intake coordinator at the IFSP meeting what could be done since the process took too long. She stated that she would not apologize for her caseload and that she was working as fast as she could. We found this response to be very rude and it didn't answer our question. We then asked about compensatory services to make up for the lost time and she acted as though we were being unrealistic in our expectations. Needless to say, the whole process was very long and frustrating. However, now that our son is receiving therapy (speech and occupational) we are very pleased. The therapists we work with are caring, professional and very easy to work with. We couldn't be happier with them. Our child has already made progress in the past two months and continues to improve every week. The therapists are wonderful. Obviously, the weakness of the First Steps program lie within the organization and communication skills of certain people.

First Steps is an extremely important and extremely useful program. It offers immeasurable help to children with handicaps. I know of no other agency that offers children and families this type of help and assistance.

First Steps has been a blessing to our family. Our child is steadily making progress. Our service provider educates us on how we can assist our child in her progress. First Steps has assured us that they will help us with any necessary transitions.

I am so thankful for our occupational and physical therapists provided to us through First Steps. I honestly do not believe that our daughter would be progressing as well as she is without their excellent support and care. It is a wonderful program. Being able to have the therapists come to our house is so beneficial and helpful to all of us. I do think the service coordinator should be more involved and parents should be given detailed descriptions of the services available so that we can be more informed and make better decisions for their child as to what services he/she could benefit from. For example, I have not heard from our service coordinator since January. The last thing I asked her was to see if we could get aquatic therapy for our daughter, as it had been recommended by several doctors. I still have not heard from her. I don't think I should have to chase her down. However, now I must, so that I can best help my child.

I have never met anyone of the individuals who were suppose to be involved with my child other than his speech therapist who has been wonderful and very informative. She has greatly helped my child and has been an absolute godsend to our family.

I only found out about First Steps because our therapist at the hospital was going on maternity leave and suggested it to us. Our daughter responded to at-home services much better than in the clinic. Thank you.

I can only say, I am so pleased. We changed our service coordinator and she is wonderful.

Our service coordinator is excellent. Whenever I have a need or question, she's a phone call away and her response is immediate. She is an asset to the program. Our therapists have all done a wonderful job with my child. She has improved so much due to their therapy, patience, knowledge, and understanding. Thank you for the First Step services. God bless.

We have been very pleased with all the prior service we have received from First Steps. However, we have been very disappointed in the speech therapist's lack of communication and failure to give up copies of her reports/evaluations.

I think it would help if hospitals took the time to share with parents about First Steps. Our hospital didn't tell me about the program. I learned about early intervention from a support group on the internet. That's when I went searching on the internet where I found the application myself. Parents should know about the program through their hospital or doctor. I think there needs to be more information out there for parents. If I had not had the internet, I would have never known about First Steps!

My physical and speech therapists are excellent. I'm very lucky to have both of them! This program is great and I've had no problems with anything involving First Steps.

My son and I enjoy all of our therapists and they all are very nice and explain things very well. We are learning from each other. If I find out something new about his condition, I tell them and they tell me anything they know. They all deserve big thanks for taking on a child when no one knew anything about his syndrome. A very special thanks to First Steps because, without your services, my son may have never learned how to walk, feed himself, or talk. So, thank you all.

Our therapist didn't work on my concerns with both children, even though, she had swallow studies done on both. One didn't have swallowing problems and so she released him and quit working with him. The other one only got his therapy if me or grandma did it. Even on the days and times that she was here, she didn't work with my children/child. Other than this problem, everything is great. It has been brought up with our service coordinator and she has been working on a replacement for the speech therapist.

I know that I was not totally aware of all the First Step benefits. Right now, she is growing so much and it has been a great three or four months of improvement. The three therapists that come are exceptional, especially the speech/swallow therapist! Thank you for all of your support! You guys are awesome.

I also work in the area of special education and personally feel the Matrix system on the computer could be improved. It can be very confusing, especially for someone who is not familiar with the system and services.

I am so thankful for the free service that my son has received for the past several months. All of his helpers that come to our house are very friendly and take good care of my son while they are here.

The help that First Steps has given my son has made it a lot better because I never would have known how to help him. But, now I do.

Our service coordinator does a great job of describing benefits, but the written materials given to us at the beginning were nearly incomprehensible. I'm an attorney and could barely make heads or tails of them. They need to be put into plain English. No acronyms!

Simplify and expedite therapist enrollment into the program.

Need better service coordinators.

I'm very happy with our coordinators! I always feel that anytime I need something, they are right there! I'm happy with our therapist. She's very helpful and caring.

I had some trouble getting the help my child needed.

Our old coordinator is completely incompetent and should not be allowed to work with families at all. I would definitely recommend our new coordinator to anyone.

I have no comments for improvement, but I do want to thank you for all of First Step's help. Thank you again.

The First Steps individuals were extremely nice to deal with. However, getting the program started literally took months. Somehow, this process needs to be shortened. My children are now close to age three and have to leave this program.

This is a great program!

I have nothing but compliments for First Steps. We recently moved from another state and I was not aware of any similar programs there. I especially like that First Steps is available to everyone and is not based on income. I would gladly write a letter of support to Congress if an address is provided.

The service coordinator we began with did not inform us of the transition process we would need to make in order for our child to receive speech services through the public school (if necessary). We switched coordinators due to this, and luckily, were able to implement an IEP before the end of the school year. While our child has a very mild speech problem, mostly just articulation now, we feel the coordinator did not do the job she was required to do. We relied mostly on our child's speech therapist to keep us informed about the steps to take once our child turns three. Also, we feel the speech therapist is the most important part of First Steps and her knowledge of services weighs heavier than anyone else's. We trust her completely and value her opinions and suggestions with regard to our child's speech development. If she sees an area in our child's speech development that, in her opinion, should be worked on, such as articulation and not just language development, we feel she should work on such an area. People in the First Steps program who do not work one-on-one with our child should not determine what services are needed. The speech therapist should do so, with our approval.

We have just begun First Steps, but have already seen a difference in our child.

Thank you.

We were not receiving developmental therapy on the individual level like First Steps was paying for from August 2003 through April 2004.

Our coordinator is wonderful! She is so nice when she checks in on us and always has tons of information to pass on. My child's physical therapist is also great. However, communication needs to be improved. If you have any questions, please feel free to call.

My child's physical therapist is great. However, communication needs improvement. Any questions, please feel free to call.

Keep up the good work!

I wish there was a program available for these children beyond the age of three. Our child is going to need help for several more years.

Right now, it seems we are playing "catch up" with our child. Rural Missouri is a tough place to raise a child that needs a little extra support. We just don't have the resources urban areas have.

More information is needed to inform families about exactly what types of services can be provided by First Steps (Regarding #5).

I am satisfied with all people, paperwork, and other aspects of the First Steps program. Everyone has been very helpful and understanding and explain all they do. You are all to be appreciated. God bless!

First Steps is a very great and important part of my son's life. I am very glad we are getting all of the help we need through First Steps.

As a former special educator of three to five year olds, I feel that this program is a great asset to our state. Just try to get the word out more about this program. There are lots of kids out there who can benefit from early intervention.

Regarding #5 - We have more than one child with hearing problems and we knew how the "system" worked prior to our confirmation of our youngest's loss. Since we had daily contact with service providers and because of newborn infant screening, we had easier access to First Step's than before. The hard part was still with the medical community and getting "medical necessity" status. I agree that the responses don't imply anything negative, but the questions don't invoke any strong response.

It has taken longer to get my second child's referral meeting set up. The meeting, or a returned call to set up the referral meeting, was only completed after a doctor was referred too.

It would have been great to know about First Steps before we paid for services that would have been covered. How can this be resolved?

We could not get another physical therapist when the other one quit. I believe that the First Steps program is a wonderful program. I know it has helped my son a lot. The only concern I have is finding a therapist for each area of need. I don't think there are a lot of them out there. The therapist my son currently has is wonderful. Thank you so much First Steps.

My service coordinator has been wonderful. She has helped me and my family out a lot. She helps me to understand everything.

This has been a wonderful experience for our family. My daughter is really improving and she's so much happier! Thank you First Steps!

We appreciate every service to help our child reach his potential.

First Steps has been a wonderful service provided to our family. We have had very highly qualified service providers. As a parent educator for a local school district I was very disappointed in the response time that families received by the intake person. I also waited five months for services to begin with my son because she dropped the ball several times during the process. Initially, I was very disappointed in the program, but am very pleased now.

Make pediatricians offices more aware of First Steps program. Also, increase timelines for initial return calls for admission into program. Once in the program everything is great! A godsend! Hooray First Steps!

I am thrilled with our speech therapist - very well educated with children who have hearing loss. But, I feel that the other team members are in a big rush to call my child average instead of seeing her as a child with unique learning needs due to hearing loss. I am, however, willing to try to work towards giving her what she needs with the staff. I am still hopeful that she will get everything she needs to ready her for kindergarten.

I am disappointed that they had to close the class building because I feel it was good for the children to interact with others with similar problems.

Our therapists have had such a positive helpful attitude that my daughter has made remarkable progress. We are so happy with First Steps. Thank you so much! My older daughter also received First Steps services. Next week she will be discharged from services and will start kindergarten in the fall. She no longer needs any type of therapy. I can't tell you what this means to us. At two years old she had no verbal skills and severe Dysphasia. Thanks to the dedication of her therapists, who also helped us develop a home program, and my child's own wonderful attitude and spirit, she has no limitations. Thank you! I cannot say enough about them or about the gift they have given our family.

We really like our coordinator. She's great!

I have used First Steps with two of my three children and this program has helped them make a lot of progress with their speech. Before First Steps, they only used grunting to speak to us for things they wanted. Now, they say, "milk", "food", "cereal", "kool-aid", and some other object words. I will recommend this program to everyone I meet.

We believe that First Steps is a great program. He (our son) was enrolled through the NICU before he came home from the hospital, and without First Steps, I doubt that we would have been able to access the appropriate care for him.

It's an awesome program!

I feel the service coordinators are over their capacity of families and I find a lack of follow-through because of that! I have now waited two months for a physical therapy evaluation and not had one scheduled yet, despite my calls to the coordinator and service provider. We'll keep trying. Also, I was very confused about eligibility at first and felt I was expected to know everything my child was eligible for, what programs were out there and what would be best for her. I always feel my service coordinator is in a rush and something is left out, mostly what's going on. However, she is a very nice person, but too busy with everyone on her portfolio.

I really appreciate our therapists. They have really made my daughter a part of their family which makes me feel safe. I love them dearly.

I am very frustrated. My service coordinator is overworked. She has too many families, and as a result, cannot give each family what they need. I wish my service coordinator could show more compassion and empathy to me and my family. She is not educated enough about what services are out there and how to get the ones we need.

Notify area medical professionals of services. They will then be able to refer newly diagnosed families.

If service hours are missed because the provider couldn't keep the scheduled session, they don't usually try to reschedule with me.

Make more speech therapists available. My therapist had surgery and we have not had a session in three weeks. A substitute was not readily available. So, I chose to wait for my regular person.

Thank you for the availability of this service.

I don't remember seeing his IFSP and I don't know of specific "early intervention" staff unless that is his therapist. First Steps has been great in getting our child the therapies that he needs. Thanks.

I greatly appreciate the services my child has been able to receive through First Steps.

We didn't really use a service coordinator. Our coordinator changed with no impact or communication (although communication was not needed). The coordinator ran the six month meetings. The developmental specialist had the best information and made an impact. The physical/occupational therapist was helpful and communicated well. Currently, there are no significant development delays. I'm afraid we will soon finish with First Steps. This was an awesome program and I'm such a better parent having had the First Steps experience.

Our service coordinator and therapist have been wonderful people to work with. Thank you for all of your help.

First Steps was more help to me than to, perhaps, my child. My child has began speaking but who is to say it was a natural progression or my and his speech therapist's attempts at helping him speak. Our speech therapist was very helpful in telling me what to do or expect next.

I love my daughter's therapist!

Although it took me a while to find the program, First Steps has been wonderful with my daughter and I appreciate all of the work that goes into helping us.

Make sure your intake coordinators all understand that many factors need to be considered for a child to qualify for First Steps. My child's Rossetti Infant Language Scale's six sections were averaged together, which made him not qualify. This was unacceptable because he could not talk except in grunts. With the help of our speech therapist, we pushed for a re-test with two additional tests (PSL and REEL), added the pediatricians recommendations, and also those of the Parents As Teachers representative, and HE QUALIFIED! My speech therapist told me you have made changes in this direction (i.e., stop averaging the parts of a single test to make qualification decisions). I hope this is true! I will say, I am very pleased with my son's progress, and everyone even with the glitches at the beginning, treated me very nicely and professionally.

Our service coordinator is excellent and we don't want to lose her through the transition process. This would be a disservice to all the families with learning impaired children.

I imagine it was a capacity issue, but it was very hard, in the beginning, to get anyone to call me back. I left a number of messages and got no response, so I found a therapist on my own who happened to work with First Steps and worked backwards to get coordination.

We would have appreciated a more timely meeting and set-up by the intake coordinator. We had to wait two and half months, after our pediatrician notified First Steps of our child's needs, before our IFSP was completed and services could begin. That's a long time for nervous, concerned parents! Our service coordinator and speech pathologist are excellent! We couldn't ask for better.

We are very thankful to First Steps. We are happy with our child's progress.

I am very impressed with our speech therapist and the progress we are making with my son.

Great program!

Keep up the great work!

Have been completely impressed with the program.

We appreciate being a part of this program.

First Steps is an excellent program. It has helped my son a lot. Thank you.

I had to "stay on" the intake coordinator (and initially the SPOE) to get the process started as we did not receive the intake packet and no one followed up. In fact, they found it in the trash with the incorrect address on it. It would have been nice to have a follow-up phone call when the intake did not hear from us via the paperwork, in spite of my numerous phone calls. All other interactions have been fine with intake.

The overall development of my son now is 100% better than before. All of the people that have helped us will forever be in our hearts and prayers. We are much better off because of First Steps.

First Steps has been awesome. I am very pleased with our services!

This has been an incredible experience and our service coordinator is really top notch! She was always available to answer questions and concerns and responsive to inquires (great listener, professional, and complete). She has been amazing. I feel so fortunate to have had fantastic therapists on our team. Our First Steps experience has been tremendous. I can't say enough positive things about First Steps.

Although I am an educator and am aware of the development of children, First Steps has been great for my child. We were very pleased with all of our therapists. Thank you.

Wonderful program. Very well organized and great staff. I am very impressed and satisfied.

We have had a great service coordinator and service providers. Even though we were recommended to First Steps from the NICU, it took a lot of persistence on my part to get a hold of the intake coordinator. She was very difficult to work with. If a family is not persistent, they may fall through the cracks! I'd be happy to answer any other questions.

What a wonderful program. We don't know what we would have done without it.

I have to say that I am very disappointed with the service coordination that my family "received". My calls were never returned; meetings were never scheduled; and questions were never answered. This coordinator was paid on a monthly basis and I do not feel this was warranted. I am upset because I went through this very tough time in my family's life with absolutely no help whatsoever! I have been so confused as to how this process works. I did not find out about the role of my service coordinator until very recently (six months to the end of his time with First Steps). I strongly feel that the service coordinator's role for me, as well as other families, should be to check up on us. I hope that other families will not have to go through what my family and I went through. As far as the therapy/therapists my child received, I am very pleased. They treated my son well and really caused dramatic changes in his development. I am so thankful to have participated in this program for his sake even though I had a tough time. Thank you!

The First Steps program has been an important part of our child development. The program has given us direction and support that was much needed.

We love First Steps and our service coordinator.

I would create a website that is easier to access and understand.

We've had a wonderful experience with First Steps. Our service coordinator has been wonderful and our providers have been very knowledgeable and flexible.

Our service coordinator is very helpful with what is expected from everyone and how to reach that goal. She has informed me more about First Steps and calls to update me on where we are and what I need to do. I have never had a service coordinator so committed to doing her best for my child.

I feel that a rule/regulation needs to be installed with First Steps that indicates if the physical therapist or any other provider decides to take an extended summer vacation (three months), they need to be obligated to notify the family at least one month in advance. My daughter's physical therapist took off from May 28th until the fall. She didn't indicate when she was returning, giving only a twelve-day notice. Her letter of explanation was dated May 6, 2004, but it was about two weeks later when I received the notice. She left fifteen to twenty people scrambling to find new arrangements. The problem with this situation was not enough time was given to find adequate arrangements. In addition, when my daughter was placed with this person, it took over one and half months to get her added. After reviewing the availability on the internet, there are very few physical therapist's available with open time slots right now. If you have any questions, please contact me. Overall, I am happy with the First Steps program.

The initial time it took to get things started was disappointing. Also, I love that we get to pick our own therapist. But, in the beginning, it was overwhelming. There needs to be guidance for picking a therapist for the new families.

First Steps has become an important role service in our families lives.

It has been a wonderful service. The therapists are a blessing to us. Thanks so much for helping my daughter!

We've found First Steps to be a very comprehensive and very helpful program. It is family-oriented and convenient (therapists visit in our home. Our nine-month-old son is the recipient of developmental therapy, however, our whole family (older siblings included) are all learning so much from the therapist who visits our child. This is a wonderful program for Missouri families. Thanks for all you do.

I am so happy my child has First Steps. She has improved dramatically over the past ten months.

Thank you for your service to our daughter. We are grateful for this program.

Our child died in February. From December 2003 until February 2004 we were satisfied with all our therapists. My service coordinator did not stay in contact enough (she only called us one time). My overall experience with First Steps was satisfactory.

Took far too long (months) to have initial contact and initial evaluation. My son missed out on at least an additional month of early intervention because of the delay after my initial call.

I think Missouri has a wonderful program in First Steps. I would like better communication with some of our therapists. I would like to see more than "play therapy", but I'm grateful for the help

I think our daughter would have improved more with speech had we been referred earlier to your program.

We had difficulty, at the time of signing up, getting an intake coordinator to call us or meet with us. After we were finished with her though, the therapists and service coordinator were superb.

We have been very happy with First Steps. Our intake coordinator was particularly helpful and made the enrollment process very quick. The time between contacting First Steps to the day of our first speech therapy session, was only a couple of weeks. Our son's speech has improved dramatically thanks to First Steps and an excellent speech therapist.

I didn't know what First Steps was until the special education teacher told me. I had never heard of First Steps until then. My first daughter could have used First Step's help. She is Autistic.

I feel that First Steps has given me and my family all the resources we needed to help my child. If it wasn't for you, I don't know how I would have gotten the help I did. Thank you.

I was overwhelmed at the process of selecting therapists (information on Matrix too limited/vague). I could have used more help choosing a good therapist, based on a personal preference and not just based on a zip code. I want to know whose skills meet my child's needs the best.

I knew nothing about First Steps until January 2004, after my child had a hearing test. Therefore, he will not get the benefit from the program on a long-term basis. He has speech development and occupational therapists working with him. I don't really see how the speech portion is helping my child with his language delays, but I'm trying to remain optimistic.

Our service coordinator has been pretty useless. She sounds annoyed and bothered when we call to request the setup of services. Our taxpayer dollars are sadly wasted with this "professional".

Thank you for your help and insight.

I am pleased with First Steps. I think they are a great program that helps with children's disabilities.

We switched occupational therapists after the one we picked cancelled most of the scheduled meetings. We have since selected another occupational therapist. We felt we lost a couple of months of therapy, but we are hoping our daughter will catch up. Our service coordinator was helpful during this process.

Too new to the program to evaluate fully.

We were told there would be no help (financially) for hearing aids, and so we bought them ourselves. Then, a week or two later, we were told there would be help. But, because we had not used a First Steps provider, we were out of luck. It took multiple calls from myself and my child's pediatrician and audiologist before anyone responded to our first contact with First Steps. In fact, we had to call someone in the state department to get any action. Basically, from top to bottom, you need more clarification and communication and in a more timely fashion.

Better communication - one therapist quit seeing my son without informing me!

Thank you and God bless!

Allow for more providers with necessary training. Give more training to caseworkers and keep them updated with opportunities and resources available to families. Thank you for this program. It has helped us tremendously!

When I first applied, First Steps was changed from CDCA. I was delayed, big time, because of it. But since changing to our new coordinator, I have had an excellent experience with First Steps. Thank you

I had a service coordinator that, at first, was a great help. Then, in April, began to be very hard to reach and so we made the choice to switch to a new service coordinator.

I felt the intake coordinator rushed through the IFSP to satisfy the wishes of a provider. The meeting did not last longer than thirty minutes.

I would like to take the time to inform you that you have a wonderful program of therapies. We appreciate very much the help that has been given our daughter and could in no way afford to provide her with all this wonderful therapy. On a more negative level, it has been somewhat a struggle to get the help sometimes. Although we value the program, I would have to question some of the procedures. Trying to set up a team was stressful as a lay person. I was pretty lucky in that I only had to change people a few times. Approval for equipment was sometimes difficult and lengthy, and not knowing exactly who to question on those issues, made it difficult to get results. But, as long as you are willing to fight for it, it will come through. One other area of concern that was brought to my attention is return or, I am told, lack of equipment and/or storage. I just wonder how much money could be saved if equipment was collected, cleaned and used for others. Perhaps a volunteer program of parents could be set up - just a thought. As with any program, there is always room for improvement. Thank you again, and all parties involved, for the support of helping our family through a difficult time.

Our first caseworker did not communicate with us as we had hoped. But, ever since our current caseworker took over, she has been extremely helpful. She is very knowledgeable about what she does and responds to all of our questions and needs right away. Without her help and First Steps, we don't know what we would have done to this point.

I have not spoken with the service coordinator since our child was enrolled about five weeks ago.

My child has Down's Syndrome and my therapists are wonderful. They would track me down no matter where I was to get the things for my daughter. First Steps was a new beginning to help my beautiful child. Thank you.

We have been thrilled with everyone we have met through First Steps. The only difficulty we had was getting phone calls returned and getting started. Services took a long time, but once we were accepted by First Steps, everything ran smoothly. It just took a long time to get started.

Wonderful program.

I would just like to let you know that my daughter's therapist is great. She makes her visits more into a "playtime" instead of treatment. I am very happy and thankful for the results we are seeing.

I did not know until recently of the behavior specialists that were available. I wish I'd known earlier.

I would like for my child to receive the services he needs as soon as possible, without waiting too long.

I feel they are doing a great service for people. They are a very necessary and useful organization. I am very pleased with them.

We have truly valued our experience with First Steps. Only suggestion is to reinforce Pediatrician's knowledge and referrals of First Steps in the community. Thanks to all you do!

I have nothing but the utmost regard and praise for the First Steps therapists we've had.

There is a lack of discussing and communication of all available resources for a child for a particular diagnosis. I believe the therapists for my child should have a strong background/experience in the area where that child has specific needs. Contractual issues, state funding, and school district issues need to be brought up as soon as possible when it will affect that child and their services.

Sometimes, service coordinators are not responding to what our concern is about. But if I complain, then they act. It's hard to tell what you need.

The therapists we had were almost always late in showing up and also had to frequently request time and schedule changes. Also, I wasn't impressed with the speech therapist. Didn't feel her time with my child was any benefit.

First Steps is an excellent program and our child would not have improved and done as well as he has without the program and the therapists.

As I stated in an email dated January 2004, we had a most difficult time in the initial phases of evaluation and IFSP planning. Our intake coordinator was difficult to reach and was not at all helpful in directing us as to how to move through the process, even though our child had a medical diagnosis of Down's Syndrome that all but insured acceptance into the program. We did not even get the Parent Handbook until our IFSP. That would have been most helpful if we would have gotten that much earlier. The handbook itself is great. I highly recommend setting up regular "introduction to First Steps" meetings or information sessions so people can understand the district differences between the intake process and the actual First Steps program. Please know that since our IFSP and since we "made it" through the initial nightmarish intake process, we have been EXTREMELY HAPPY AND PLEASED with the entire First Steps program. Our service coordinator has been great with timely phone calls, authorizations and other communication. Our therapists have been knowledgeable and professional and have always kept our daughter's best interest at the forefront of their sessions. We have been very pleased with the services provided since the intake and feel quite fortunate to have such a great program available for our family. Thank you. I would be happy to provide more information or to make suggestions for a better intake experience for others.

"Somewhat" should be one of the options for an answer. My child has a visual impairment and Congenital Glaucom. I have not received any support or information about this.

Finding out about First Steps was not easy. Luckily, I heard about the program from our parent educator (from Parents As Teachers). Had we not been participating in Parents As Teachers, I don't think we would have heard about the First Steps program. I, therefore, strongly believe that information regarding the program should be available and disseminated through obstetricians and hospitals delivering babies, and pediatricians, family doctors, and health departments providing care to those babies. These sources did not provide me with any information about First Steps. I am very pleased with the First Steps program. The services my child has received have made a tremendous positive impact on her developmental progress. Locating therapists via the internet was easy and convenient. However, I found that a lot of the information contained in the Matrix was not updated. The Matrix would be much more useful if data contained therein was updated more frequently. Thank you!

Educate someone at the NICU to answer questions as far as what First Steps is. When we were given a letter informing us our baby may be qualified, there was no one on staff who could tell me what First Steps was!

Early intervention, literally since my child was four or five days old in the children's hospital, we believe has made all the difference in his great progress! Thank you!

My service coordinator and therapist have done an excellent job.

I was not aware of this program and learned through Parents As Teachers. Our pediatrician NEVER mentioned this even though I had voiced concerns. We had been going to a speech pathologist, but no one through our medical community had told us about First Steps. Too bad we wasted time when he could have been getting services. We loved the therapists. They were all so helpful and positive. They were great assets to the team! They have done wonders with our son. They have a great rapport with him and seem to thoroughly enjoy their jobs. We want to thank everyone for acting quickly and being energetic and hopeful! They were a positive first impression for First Steps! They also reacted quickly to our changes and requests. Thank you for the great experience and we are grateful our son is talking.

My service coordinator has been extremely helpful with my family in regard to my child. My child's therapist is frequently late or doesn't show up at all. They give no notice that they are not coming or need to cancel. When they do work with my child, their therapy has helped him.

We would like to see First Steps become "Next Steps" as well. We like the continuity and stability in our child's life and would like to see the program continue. We would also like our child to receive services in the private school that his siblings attend, but our child cannot if no longer in First Steps. We like that it is family-oriented and child-oriented and not school-oriented.

Now that my child receives services (i.e. therapy), things are great! But, it took three referrals and over four months to even see the right person. I was told time and time again, "The girl handling your case got sick and someone new took over. Please wait a few weeks." These weeks turned into months. Thank you for these services, but the process of getting into the system was beyond frustrating.

It was initially difficult to get started with First Steps due to a lot of red tape. I contacted First Steps initially in November and did not have services until February. Three months is a long time to wait for early intervention. Once we qualified, the service has been great and we are very pleased. Thanks for a really great program for kids and families that need it.

More information about advocacy and how we can help to plan our child's IFSP's.

We really appreciate the help from First Steps. I think the word needs to go out to providers for early referral. My son could have benefited early with hearing aids but the doctor's office he was going to didn't know, or realize, that help could be received so early. Thanks!

I'm so thankful for the program. It has been a huge blessing. It was difficult to find out about the program. Family doctors and Parents As Teachers need to become better educated so they can refer those with a developmental delay.

I have not heard from my service coordinator in months.

I had friends who were in the First Steps system. I was able to, with their help, use the Matrix. I don't think though that for the "average" family this system is very "user friendly." If you didn't have access to a computer, would your service coordinator find the therapists? I also think that finding the therapists was very time consuming! I thought in the past someone else found the therapists for you. I was capable and able to do this. I'm sure this isn't the case for everyone.

Love and appreciate the program and the people involved in it who are working with us.

We appreciate very much the First Steps program. It helped our son reach a normal developmental level in most areas. We are grateful for the assistance we received.

It took nearly six months from my first call to First Steps before receiving our first evaluation. Parents As Teachers was very helpful in giving me names to call to check on progress. In the year my daughter has received therapy I have spoken to the service coordinator two times (I called her both times)! I am now waiting on a transfer since my daughter turned three. This is her third week without therapy and I have yet to receive a phone call. I began the process by calling the service coordinator four months ago, in May, to find out what would have to be done.

No one told me about First Steps. I began doing extensive research on my own and discovered the program. The service coordinator is too passive. I am my child's advocate. Providers have been extremely helpful.

I appreciate everything you all have done for my child. I recommend you to people I feel will benefit from your services. We will miss all of you.

Don't second guess the needs of individual children. Each child needs the early intervention to put him/her on par with other children their age. If you stop because you feel he/she is advanced enough, they will surely fall behind in a school environment.

I will be forever grateful to the First Steps program for these early intervention services for my son. Thank you!

I'm very grateful for First Steps. It is one of the best programs I have joined for my kids.

Our intake coordinator was super fantastic! Very thorough and helpful! Past service coordinators were very reliable and helpful but seemed to carry a huge load of cases.

Since the changes made to the administration of the First Steps program recently, we lost our service coordinator and got a new coordinator. You should have found a way to keep people together instead of keeping computers and paperwork together.

Thank you for allowing my child to be in First Steps.

I don't agree with any occupational or physical therapist having the right to form their opinion of discipline, especially, if they don't have children themselves.

We are so pleased with the help, respect, and understanding of First Steps. Our coordinator calls often to check on my child and our speech therapists are amazing. It is so amazing to see what they have done so far for us. Our son can say, "mom and dad", and lots of other words. We love to hear him talk.

*It was easy to learn about First Steps (we previously had a child who had received services, so we knew of it). It was, however, NOT easy to find out if our child was eligible for services this time. The paperwork SAT on the coordinator's desk for WEEKS. That was the "weak link" in this process. We had NO CONTROL except to call repeatedly to check on progress (by leaving messages and waiting for callbacks). This was MOST frustrating because we LOST a lot of time, that could have been therapy time, waiting for the paperwork to be done. (See timeline enclosed.) The 45-day compliance was not met. In fact, it was closer to THREE MONTHS! We also were not told that we could have been eligible for compensatory services.

First Steps Timeline 2003

April (Last week)	I called First Steps office to enroll my child; left message.
May 8:	Letter from First Steps -assigned coordinator to us -letter said we'd be contacted in the next several days
May 16:	I called First Steps office-had received no call
June 2:	I called First Steps office - had received no call
June 19:	Met with coordinator at 9:30-did First Steps paperwork.
July 24:	My child's evaluation performed
July 25/28:	Talked with therapist's office re: evaluation completion
August 8:	I called/left message with coordinator-left message-said she'd call We received no call
August 21:	I called coordinator's office - on vacation - left message to call
***According to my child's therapist, she had to fax my child's evaluation results multiple times to our coordinator during this time period.	
September 2:	I called coordinators office -was told was working on IFSP -I asked what the next step was - whose responsibility? -coordinator was rude
September 18:	IFSP occurred (Note: was told at the meeting about how my child would transfer OUT of First Steps/paperwork would be started in January!)
September 25:	First speech therapy session scheduled.

We had been through the First Steps program about four years ago with our son so we did not go into this blindly. We knew it would take a great deal of time to do paperwork and get so many parties involved. Even with that knowledge, we found this time around painstakingly SLOW and ridiculously delayed. Also, we had to initiate EVERY step of the process. The 45-day compliance was not met.

More funding.

My son was diagnosed late and my daughter was diagnosed early. Services started late after not being notified of what was going on and the reason for the delay. Services got started right before they stopped. We did work and play together as a family fine all along.

Pay providers sooner so they don't get discouraged and want to look for different employment (for independent therapists). I feel First Steps has made it so difficult for people to become ABA implementors (one month to just get all paperwork through and then eight weeks after start working until they see first paycheck at \$10 an hour). No wonder they lack interest in working and becoming ABA implementors. This is creating a shortage for Autistic children who really need them to reprogram their behaviors! P.S. ABA implementing is the only therapy I had great difficulty with. In all other therapies, it was easy to find good people who were very reliable. It is nice to have a choice on the people doing the therapy, in general, so we can change a therapist if they aren't working out.

We are very grateful for all the services First Steps has given.

Our service coordinator has been wonderful. We really appreciate everything she has done so far for our child.

It takes a long time to get the process started. There is a lot of paperwork. I feel the Matrix is hard to get to on the internet.

Great program. My daughter is going to be her best developmentally due to her services. Her therapists are the best!

I'm having a hard time increasing the frequency of visits that my child needs per week by our speech/language pathologist. The service coordinator never followed through with monthly contracts as laid out in our IFSP.

It would have been nice to know about this service other than through Parents As Teachers. I think there are so many families missing out on the service due to lack of knowledge about First Steps. The only way I heard of First Steps is through Parents As Teachers.

Thank you!

Our first service coordinator never responded to us after the initial meeting. We replaced her and now have a good service coordinator. Some people on the Matrix have not contacted us appropriately as explained above. Need a better system to file complaints.

There have been some real disconnects with my child and her continuation of services. My child was seeing an occupational therapist who moved in May. There was no continuation of occupational therapy and there should have been. Part of this was my fault because I worked nights, among other things, and I did not insist or follow-up on a continuation. I have my first appointment with one tomorrow. I have a physical therapist assigned who is to see her monthly! I have checked with my day care provider who has not seen him in over six months. I am totally pleased with my case manager, but have some reservations about others already mentioned. My child needs help.

First Steps has done a very good job in helping my daughter walk and perform certain duties with her right hand. They are great! Our therapist is AWESOME! She has helped a lot.

My intake coordinator was difficult to contact and get the process moving. Once we were handed over to the service coordinator, it has been a much better and helpful experience.

First Steps has been a life saver. They have given us so many people who are very knowledgeable and work wonderfully with my child. She has come so far thanks to all her great therapists. Thank you!

In order to give you a more accurate description of our experience with First Steps, I had to separate some of your questions and rate them individually. Please see back for answers. #5: It was easy to learn about First Steps? (4-Strongly Disagree). It was easy to find out if my child was eligible for services? (3-Disagree). I rated this a "3-Disagree", because of the individual therapist. It was because of most of them not doing his evaluation and scoring it in a timely manner. Then, it was extremely hard to schedule with some of them. #8: Service coordinator I have does an excellent job of listening and supporting our family? (1-Strongly Agree). The Service providers listened and respected me. This is hard to answer because I have two who have done a great job. I would give only those two a "Strongly Agree" rating. However, I have had two speech/language and two occupational therapists that I would rate as "4-Strongly Disagree". My overall answer, averaging in the very bad therapists, "4-Strongly Disagree". I feel that some type of sensitivity training should be mandatory. Supervisors from these individual companies should occasionally do an in-house observation and make phone calls to the families where we can then provide information on their performance. I have had some very unprofessional things happen in my home to my child and family. These therapists have to be made accountable, in some way, for their behavior. Also, not everyone was meant to work with preschool children. When you add disabilities to the mix, it really takes a special person. I have only had one person work with my child through this entire experience that I can say truly has a gift to work with special needs children. Just because they have a degree does not make them good at what they do. #On question 12, the only reason I did not put, "Strongly Agree", is because it is hard to get ahold of her during times like the month of May when IEP's were having to be completed. In other words, she seems overworked. But, all other areas are, "Strongly Agree". #13: I knew how to work with professionals and advocate for my child before First Steps. So, no, your program did not help me with that area and I, "Strongly Disagree-4". I'm sure that is not how you meant the question, but it certainly needs to be rephrased. #15: Only his ABA therapist knows how to work with him. My service coordinator knows a lot too and on these two, I "Strongly Agree". My answer is really, "Strongly Disagree-4", when I average all the people that worked with us this year. Most of the therapists knew nothing about how to work with a child with disabilities. They tried to do things in a "normal" way and that does not work. #17: I receive information and explanation about the services my child needs? (3-Disagree). I have to ask for almost all information. I believe the services my child receives are appropriate? (2-Agree)

Our service coordinator was exceptional.

It took months to get evaluated for the First Steps program. I would suggest more intake coordinators to help with this. First Steps is a true benefit to our family.

I didn't like it when you decided to have the workers show up with NO toys. The child looks forward to a change and now he has to play with toys that he sees 24-7. It's taking time away from the child to look for something of his he might like to do! My one hour visit turned out to be only thirty to forty-five minutes. So, what if we, the parents, buy the same toys? It's our choice. The worker said that we didn't have to! Please rethink that choice.

It was difficult to select a therapist. I was given a list of providers and had little time to research them. Most of them did not even include descriptions or credentials. I may as well have thrown a dart and chosen whoever it landed on. It would be nice to have the opportunity to learn about the providers before choosing one.

When our son started receiving services, he was significantly behind in gross motor coordination. At his last evaluation he was several months ahead of children his age! I cannot say enough wonderful things about First Steps and my son's physical therapist.

Special equipment ordered needs to arrive much faster! We have ordered equipment that may take two months to receive. What good is that when the child has either outgrown it or doesn't need it anymore.

My initial introduction with First Steps left me with a bad taste in my mouth. I do not feel that all aspects of the program were explained to me. For example, it was not explained to me that I could have anyone present at my son's IFSP meeting, per my request. I did switch service coordinators in September 2003. My experience now is significantly better.

I think First Steps is a wonderful program. Our daughter has Down's Syndrome and the early intervention significantly impacted her development in a positive way. Her developmental delays would be even greater had it not been for the therapists provided through First Steps.

I did have a hard time trying to get a speech therapist. Other than that, I can't complain. Thank you very much.

This program and the people who make it work are phenomenal. If it weren't for First Steps, I don't know where we would be!

I am disappointed that the State of Missouri uses a company in Kansas for billing purposes. I have felt that trying to get my son's team together has been difficult. If all the providers were working for one agency, then there would have been better communication among the providers about what is best for my son. There is no accountability for service coordination. If I had a complaint, there was no one to go to and explain the complaint. My current service coordinator is very unfamiliar with First Steps. I am concerned something will be overlooked.

My child has never had a speech therapist regularly during all this time. In fact, only physical therapy has been regular.

I knew my son had a speech delay at eighteen months of age. My oldest son used First Steps for language delay and has since been diagnosed as Autistic. My concerns about my youngest son prompted me to try to get hold of First Steps. Every office I called informed me that they didn't serve my area and the phone numbers I was given for their office was a number for some poor little lady that I'm sure was tired of being badgered. Just getting a hold of First Steps for the first time was a horrible and frustrating experience. Hence, my son finally had his first evaluation two months shy of his third birthday. So much for "early intervention". Since then, everyone has been wonderful. I think that First Steps is a wonderful program. I recommend them to other parents who have concerns about their children. Fortunately, my son's birthday falls at such a time that he is able to receive services until the school year starts. Thank goodness! He has made great progress. We raised our concerns about the difficulty getting a hold of First Steps during our first evaluation and we were assured it would be addressed. Our experience since has been great.

I struggle to find specialists who are on the Matrix. It's too difficult to get on, so I don't.

Our First Steps IFSP was very difficult to identify goals. Not being a therapist, I had no idea what goals were reasonable. I think parents need a bit more help/direction at the first meeting.

I wish I had known about First Steps earlier. Neither my pediatrician nor Parents as Teachers told me about the program even though my child had obvious delays. Eventually, he was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and I was told about First Steps by the orthopedic surgeon.

We have been extremely pleased with the service we have received from our physical therapist. She is very informed and caring. She has become someone we love and trust. We appreciate her and all the hard work she has put in with our child.

I appreciate everything that our therapists do for our child. They are excellent.

Our first service coordinator did not do her job in a timely manner and then tried to place the blame elsewhere!

We haven't needed much help from the service coordinator. But, I believe if we did, she would be very helpful. We are very pleased with our speech therapist.

I think that more information or advertisement needs to be put out because I never heard of it before I met a lady in St. Louis. You guys are great. We appreciate everything and all the help.

Thank you. Had a great experience.

Improvement of the Matrix website

Improvement needed to the Matrix website.

I don't know where we would be without First Steps providing services. It makes a real difference in my kids.

Get more information about the program and services provided out to the community.

Our coordinator is excellent! She never hesitates to help in any and every way that she can! She is a very dedicated and empathetic coordinator and advocate. We consider ourselves fortunate to have her on our TEAM!

Our speech therapist is wonderful! She has really helped a great deal with behavior and speech.

We really appreciate everything that everyone's done. Thanks!

My child's three therapists have helped my child so much since we enrolled that I truly thank the Lord each night for this program.

For #5: I was given brochures from two hospitals, so it was not difficult to hear about the program. It took five months to get an interview, however, and get started. I was under the impression I'd get help immediately for my baby's feeding issues. The intake coordinator was very slow and did not return phone calls, etc. I was going to give up trying, but more than a few people told me to get very assertive to get her to take care of our needs and get everything started. She seemed very scattered and not very eager to focus or concentrate on getting us taken care of right away. I really would have quit trying to get into the program because of how much trouble I was having with this situation. Since being given a case manager, everything has gone very smoothly. I don't know what we'd do without this important help. Thank you so much.

Need more people willing to work in our county.

I first contacted First Steps in January 2004 and our child just started receiving services in May. Expediting this process would improve First Steps. Otherwise, we are extremely pleased with the First Steps program.

We have nothing but good things to say about our experience with First Steps.

Service coordinator sometimes takes too long to return phone calls.

Your program is very useful. I have a two-year-old daughter that is going to be evaluated for First Steps. Keep up the good work.

Just wanted to clarify things that were marked. "Somewhat Agree", is because it seems the resources for therapy that my child needed were limited, (i.e., type of speech therapy and sign language skills). Still, I am pleased with what was and has been accomplished.

First Steps is excellent for parents with multiple children because the providers come to your home.

Part of the help from First Steps is for parents. Though I think they've done a fair job, I'd have liked more help through videos, books, classes, etc., with sign language.

Our therapists were a great deal of help to my daughter. I really appreciate the time and effort they put into getting my child where she needs to be.

Have information distributed at hospitals about the program when a child is born.

Just want to let you know that our speech therapist is wonderful. My son has made so much improvement on his speech in the year that she has worked with him. I wish we could keep her forever! She's wonderful.

It is hard to get your foot in the door with First Steps, but once there, the services are readily available to your child. I am very pleased with the First Steps program.

The services provided by First Steps came at a very low point in dealing with our daughter's problems. We cannot express how valuable and helpful all the help we received has been to our family.

A lot of the time my child's occupational therapist gets off the subject or never really gets to the point. I would really like to keep the focus on my son so we can help to take care of his problems. I feel that the occupational therapist could do a better job.

I do not believe I have ever talked with a service coordinator or an intake service coordinator. I've only worked with and talked to a speech therapist.

In my opinion, I believe the service coordinators should be monitored closely or their role needs to be explained. We saw our service coordinator in May 2003. We heard from her once (telephone message) in October 2003. We requested a new coordinator in March and was assigned someone else. We are very happy with him as he made a visit in March and has set up a meeting with all of our therapists for the IFSP meeting in May. We became unhappy when we realized that our first coordinator is being paid monthly through First Steps to file reports that are sent to her by our therapists? I hope our new coordinator has a complete file on our son who has Down's Syndrome. We really appreciate the First Steps program and know there are financial concerns. We hope that it continues because it has had a major impact on our son and our family and the other children that are being helped by these wonderful people and programs. With our sincere thanks and appreciation.

Thank you for all your help.

I'm so glad to have our service coordinator to find the people my son needs to help him with his delays. I don't know that I would have had time to make all of those phone calls.

We are extremely pleased with First Steps.

Our experience with First Steps has been fine since our child has started speech therapy. My complaint would be that the initial screening process takes entirely too long! I had to call frequently to keep things moving. My phone messages were not returned in a timely manner (usually took a minimum of three days to as much as a week). I personally know someone who just dropped out because it took too long to get her daughter into the program.

I was never told about the Autism Project. I found out about it from a parent. I requested to be put on a waiting list two to three months ago. I still have not been put on the list because the coordinator needs to do paperwork. You also need to provide information on what the Regional Center offers after First Steps. I have used First Steps with two other children. I was never told about services after First Steps. My caseworker is wonderful, but your agency puts too much work on them. You need to hire more caseworkers to lessen their caseload. You also need to hire assistance for these caseworkers to help with all the paperwork. I know finances are tight which prevents you from hiring more staff. Due to this, your services are not as good as they can be, which in turn hurts the child and the family. Please take this into consideration. If it continues, you will only burn out your employees and your services will continue to decline.

Our speech therapist is outstanding. Our whole family loves her.

Tell more people about your services. I ran into other families with children that have disabilities and they have never heard of your services!

My son had excellent home therapists. They were exceptional. We are very thankful to have had them to help us so much!

My daughter has come such a long way in a short time. Thank you!

Things need to be quicker.

Contacting and setting up the initial evaluation was very difficult. Only having one or two people serving this large county is very frustrating, especially when they are out in the field and not able to answer the phone. For the most part, we have been satisfied with our services and have seen remarkable improvements in our son. However, we wish the requirements to qualify were not 50% delayed across the board. We all know how early intervention is so important. My other son did not have a 50% delay in speech overall. Because his receptive was so good, it didn't matter that his social and verbal skills were so far delayed. He too could have benefited.

I think it was a wonderful service and my child benefited from it a lot. Thanks for all the help.

We are very appreciative of the First Steps services. The therapists are knowledgeable and very good with my child. They have also been very willing to be flexible in their schedules so as not to interfere with my work. Regarding questions #12 and #14: Our child is eligible for occupational therapy, but there is not a provider available. This has not been a major problem.

We appreciate this service greatly. The only true inconvenience has been the coordination of your billing department and the hospital's billing department. There has also been some questions as to whether the therapists are well informed on how to document and bill. Between the aforementioned and my insurance company statements, the process has been tedious.

The reason I answered #19 the way I did is due to the fact that my son has not made major improvements, but it led us to get a medical diagnosis and that may be why. We are trying to be more proactive now.

First Steps needs to examine the child's records when they are first born. My child needed to be in First Steps a long time ago. They need to go into the hospital records and see if they qualify for First Steps and let the parents know about the program. Some parents don't know about the program.

The ladies we worked with were the best! Thanks for all your help.

It was difficult for us to find a therapist that was compatible with our family. Our son has experienced three speech therapists and three occupational therapists. This inconsistency created difficulty for my child to adjust and be successful. Our therapists now are fabulous.

Very happy with the program. I cannot imagine what our son might be like without the knowledge we now have.

In the beginning, I had no response for months to get my daughter started. I actually spoke with a speech therapist who got the ball rolling for us. Since then, all is great.

The First Steps program has been wonderful! In just eleven and a half months, my son has shown so much improvement. We are very pleased!

We were set up with First Steps before we left the hospital. I believe this is vital to families who have a new special needs child. We have been very pleased and grateful for First Steps.

We didn't find out about First Steps right away. More awareness needs to be made available with newborn diagnosis. If it were not for First Steps paying for our child's therapies and hearing aids, we wouldn't be able to afford our child the gift of hearing and speech. Please do not eliminate funding (providing for hearing aids and other assistive technology)! We have a service coordinator right now who has personal experience raising a child with a hearing impairment. Relating to her and her personal experience has made our child's first year much easier to deal with therapies, hearing aids, etc. I truly appreciate that she only deals with cases of hearing impaired children. She is a wonderful resource and has made all the difficult decisions we faced this year more clear to us and easier to handle.

My coordinator sometimes says things out of the way about my son's race and I find it disrespectful.

Foster Child - not sure when services started.

Our family's service coordinator is wonderful. She has helped us so much. I am checking into respite care. My husband and I have to trade off taking care of our child on weekends and so we seldom go anywhere together and it's hard to do anything outside the home with our other two sons.

It took a long time to get the program started, nearly six months, and that became frustrating.

Parents need to get a chance to see a therapist before choosing them. It's hard to pick a therapist appropriate for your child without seeing them at work.

This is my second child with special needs. I was very familiar with First Steps procedures and where to go for help, etc. My service coordinator was more helpful and informed with my first child eight years ago.

Service coordinator and therapists should not be related (husband and wife) because it makes it awkward. Two of our therapists are great! Two other therapists (husband and wife) are too passive. One therapist cancelled plus was slow to call back without rescheduling while another therapist called in sick the first time, was one hour late the second time, and a no-show the third time. She then called three days later and left a message that she was quitting. Since it takes 50% delay to get services and it took me four months from the time I made my initial call to receiving therapy, my son missed out on several months of potential therapy and is even further behind. Now he will turn three years old with only eight months of services because it took so long to get in even though his speech delay was identified six months earlier by Parents as Teachers.

I am very thankful for the services First Steps was able to provide our family.

I have not started my IFSP as of yet.

I have been very happy with all of the people I have dealt with at First Steps. Our coordinator has been wonderful!

The most difficult part of First Steps was the initial set up. It took a lot of effort on my part to pull things together to get things started. It is a very sensitive time in a parent's life and it would be very helpful if things were handled in a more timely and caring manner.

Overall, the First Steps program has been an amazing and positive experience for our family. We are very grateful to have such a great program provided by the state. Early intervention can make such a difference for children with Autism. All of our providers are caring professionals. Two areas of concern that I think could be improved are Point of Entry services and timely payment of providers. Our initial intake worker never returned my calls until I contacted her supervisor. She was not able to come out within the specified timeline due to taking "vacation" and a heavy caseload. When she did come out, I thought the tasks of her visits were handled inefficiently. For example, such information could have been completed by me before hand such as demographic information and developmental history of my son. She hand wrote all this out herself which seemed like a waste of her time since I could have done it all before our meeting and her time could have been used more productively. After our visit, she informed me we would not be able to schedule our initial IFSP right away, once again citing her heavy caseload. I offered to contact all of our providers and set up a mutual time (which I did). This accelerated the process, but only because I set a deadline for the meeting (within the next thirty days). I strongly believe this is a weak area in the system that needs to be reorganized. I am aware that I am not the only parent with this experience. The second area of concern is timely payment of providers. Every provider who works with my son complains of problems getting paid. Problems with service coding and length of time before receiving payment. I actually had problems finding service providers to work with my son because of their experience. They told me they were no longer taking any First Steps clients because it took too long to get paid. Instead, they were opting to work with older children in the SSD program because they would have less problems getting paid. This happened on more than one occasion. Other than these issues, we have been very satisfied with the First Steps of Missouri program.

My service coordinator is very timely and truly helpful. Our intake coordinator was a huge help getting us started. Thanks.

We have been helped and encouraged so much by our service coordinator. She is such a blessing too!

The paperwork is pretty cumbersome and the approval process is slow. But, we have found First Steps to be an invaluable resource and feel that our son would not be doing as well as he is without First Steps.

Work on improving the time span from initial meeting (intake coordinator) to therapies actually starting. We were excited to hear about First Steps and how it could help our child. But, it was months before our first meeting with the intake coordinator until we actually worked with the therapists. I feel this was time lost that could have been used to help our child.

The First Steps program is really remarkable. Any parent with a special needs child should be doing this program.

We are so thankful and blessed to have First Steps available to us. We don't know what we would have done otherwise. The therapists are so wonderful as well as my service coordinator. Thank you.

I love First Steps.

Thank you!

Please make every effort to continue this program. Expansion of nursing services would be helpful. This is a wonderful program!

Thank you to everyone at First Steps. It's a great program.

Thanks for all of the help. I have seen great results.

I was told about First Steps by a social worker in the hospital. Our son's worker is based in another county. We are very pleased with her. Thank you. You have helped so much.

Lots of paperwork sent to me. I would like it emailed. Screen therapists and match them with a child with a diagnosis they are trained in.

My first coordinator was not helpful in ANY way. However, our current coordinator has redeemed the First Steps program.

Our coordinator was an absolute joy to work with. She kept me up-to-date with every step of the process and was an advocate for our son's well-being. Our speech pathologist has made a tremendous impact on our son's speech and he looks forward to her weekly visits. Thank you.

Our therapists try to make sure we have things we need for our child to always be with us - whether it's at home or traveling. I would like First Steps to last longer than three years. I'm finding that, after three, the school system may not work as well for us and we may not get the intense therapy we need.

We are very grateful to have our service coordinator. She is a very sweet and very smart lady. Thank you!

The main disappointment I have is that my daughter was rejected the first time and seven months later she was still at the same stage and the only one who seemed to really be concerned about that was the speech therapist - NOT the First Steps program itself.

My child hasn't received any services yet, so I can't answer a lot of them. I know they need more physical/occupational people working. That's what we're waiting on. The coordinator and staff were very nice.

We have not yet met with our therapist. They have cancelled at least once for every appointment set.

Our son has benefited greatly from the First Steps program. We are thankful to have learned about the program at such an early age.

First Steps is a great program. It really helped out both of our children with all the services it offers. This program also took away a lot of the stress we would have endured without this program.

I would like to see a better, more efficient ABA process. The current way it is done takes a long time (two months) to get services and providers in place.

Our coordinator has been a great help. She answers all questions and we appreciate her.

Our speech therapist is outstanding. She has worked so nicely with our child and answers all of our questions. Thank you so much for this wonderful service.

The intake process was the only bad experience because it took longer than the allowed time. Intake coordinators would not return my phone calls and I had to write a complaint letter to get the process started and have someone to return my calls. The investigating committee awarded us compensatory therapy time, but the whole process was a headache. Once we were enrolled, everything has been fine.

My therapists were awesome.

I understand that there are probably a lot of applicants for your program and that intake coordination is probably overloaded. However, from the time that I received initial approval to the time of the IFSP was three months. I do not feel this delay was timely. The intake coordinator did not return my calls and when I talked to my Parents As Teachers educator, she told me that other cases were also delayed.

Not all of the service coordinators are timely in returning phone calls, scheduling meetings, processing requests from therapists for assistive devices, etc. That area could use definite improvement.

I had to find out that there was even a First Steps program on my own. I have had two "therapists" that did not provide services per IFSP. There needs to be a better way to track the therapists and their billing!

We have been very pleased with First Steps being professional and informative.

My service coordinator was a blessing to have. She was great, easy to talk to, and always willing to help. Most of all, she was always a positive support to have, which means a lot to me. Many thanks to her for all her hard work.

Our daughter received services for a few months to help with her Tactile Defensiveness. She began walking right before we received any services. She is doing great and no longer receives services. We touch base by phone in case any issues should arise.

I love the fact that everyone comes to my daughter's environment for services concerning her. Everyone is wonderful. We don't feel so alone and helpless with the First Steps program and the information given to us concerning her speech delay.

We have seen significant improvements in our son over the last eleven months. Thank you so much for everything.

I believe First Steps needs to implement a "checks and balances" system to better monitor the actions, or lack thereof, of service coordinators.

We have seen great improvement in our son's communication skills and love his speech therapist!

I am very pleased with the services and cannot think of anything to improve it.

Since my son has been working with First Steps, he has been verbalizing a lot more.

It was a very difficult process to have our child qualify for First Steps. Our intake coordinator was very helpful and thorough. Our speech pathologist is great. Our need of a intake coordinator was unnecessary. I feel it is the parents responsibility to do anything she tried to do for us. (Contact schools, etc.)

Our therapists who are working with my child and our family are incredible. They have made a significant impact in our home. I appreciate all of their support and efforts to keep us informed.

I have had First Steps in my home a few times to fill out paperwork and IFSP forms. But, other than a nutritionist who visited two times, no therapists came to my home to actually work with my son. My coordinator has been very friendly and courteous to my needs but only calls me to tell me there is no one in my area to work with my son. Also, the most disappointing thing, other than inviting all these people in my home just to fill out paperwork, is the nursing the agency promised to me and failed to deliver. I was told the nurse did not want to drive that far just for one case. Actually, all she did was train the parents how to take care of their children. Where would this help me? How can that really be called nursing? I am not totally satisfied nor would I recommend these services to anyone else. The program is a good idea but really doesn't have the resources (staffing or networking) behind it to make it work. I would be glad to answer any other questions you may have. Thank you

Great job ladies! What a wonderful program. It is so nice to meet all the women who care so much. Thank you.

None. All the girls are wonderful! Thank you guys for a great program!

I have problems getting monthly reports from my independent providers. My service coordinator is also having problems getting this information.

We are very pleased with our service coordinator and his therapists. Thank you!

When he first started the program, we lived in another county. I had a wonderful case manager. Then she was moved into another department. I then was put in touch with a different case manager and we saw her twice - then nothing. She was trying to help me with therapies, then, nothing again. I had to talk to another case manager who came in with another case manager saying something about paperwork and then, nothing. I was going to give up, until the genetic doctor called First Steps. Our current case manager is a great person and easy to talk to and my questions are answered. I can talk to him when I need something. I know my son is not the only child they have. I just like to know he's not forgotten.

We have been waiting for a speech therapist since January 2004. We received confirmation of a speech therapist this month (May 2004), but the therapist has not contacted us.

Please give hospitals and doctors offices more information about this program so other families don't feel like they are alone. Our hospital was not aware of this program when I had my daughter. Thank you.

I feel like a huge window of learning is being missed for speech therapy. The speech therapist moved to a different county and we have been without services for two to three months.

Thanks for being there for my family.

My daughter has been with First Steps for almost two years. I have nothing but good things to say about the program and everyone involved with my daughter. Our service coordinator is the best, I feel, in the program. When I have had a concern or problem, she has taken care of it in a timely manner. Not only has she been excellent with my daughter, but she has helped me with other concerns as well. My child's physical therapist has worked hard with her and helped her progress wonderfully. She has been very patient and understanding with our schedule. She is flexible with times and understands when we can't get therapy done and is good about trying to make them up. My child's occupational therapist has done an outstanding job with my child. She has progressed so much working with her. I feel that everyone that is working with us has gone above and beyond their "job" to get my child up to where we want her to be. I feel that my child has gotten the best care that she can possibly get through First Steps. I only wish that she can continue the program when she goes to school. When I hear anyone that is in need of therapy for their child, I always recommend First Steps. If I hear that someone's child is in the program already, I always recommend our service coordinator and therapists for their child. Thank you for providing such a wonderful service.

I am absolutely amazed by this program! Our coordinator and therapists make me feel my son is the most important child in the world. God bless their program and it's people. Thank you so much.

We are very thankful for this program! Everyone from the service coordinator to the therapists have been wonderful!

All of the different therapists that my son has coming into the home have been great. The only issue our family has is with our son's speech therapist. She does the same activities week after week, which are also the same things we do all of the time. We feel that she hasn't brought anything new to the sessions to enhance our son's speech. During one of her visits, the speech therapist even admitted that she didn't know what else to do. We feel our son should be receiving better speech therapy so his delay won't be so prominent. We will be contacting the service coordination to make some changes. Overall, our family is extremely pleased with the program and we have been blessed with all of the hard work and knowledge that the therapists show with our son. Thank you!

First Steps is a fantastic program that has served my daughter well. Her therapists are truly excellent. The only problem we had was the length of time it took to get her initially evaluated. The intake coordinator did not return calls in a timely fashion. It took months for my daughter to be evaluated by the intake coordinator. Even a month to a premature infant is a long time.

Been very pleased with all the different therapists that we've encountered! No complaints. Thanks for the great service First Steps provides.

Give the families more information what different types/kinds of therapy are available. I did most of the research regarding different approaches myself!

My son was enrolled at birth. The IFSP did not take place until four months later and services did not start for another six months. The process was really drawn out and had it not been for my persistence, services would never have started.

I think the First Steps program is very wonderful. But, the one thing I wish you could change is that the instructor be nice enough to tell the family what to work on when they are away for a couple of days. Thanks!

Still waiting on an assessment for physical therapy.

Thank you!

First Steps is a wonderful program that has helped us tremendously! However, I almost dropped out before we even saw anyone. The eligibility process was disturbing, slow, discouraging and, all around, awful. It took two to three months before the person came out to discuss eligibility and therapists were able to see my son. This was quick only because of persistent calls (many unreturned). I know the caseworkers are overloaded, but kids and parents are missing out on valuable help when help is what they need most. Once we got through the arduous task of becoming eligible and started receiving therapy, the program is and has been wonderful.

The old system was terrible. Our first service coordinator never explained our rights or suggested any therapy for my child with Down's Syndrome. At six months old she could not hold her head up. After a few weeks with the therapists, she could. I feel like she is more delayed than she would have been because of the poor service coordination. We have a great one now, but we cannot get back those months that were lost. The service coordinators need much more supervision.

Our physical therapist has been a blessing to our family.

Without First Steps, we would be so lost as to how to help our child and her development would not be even half what it is today. Our providers are so wonderful and we are so thankful for this service. This is a critical time for development and we have been able to "close the gap" already. Without First Steps, we would not have been able to provide what our child needed nor known what she needed. Thank you!

Our provider of speech services was less competent than our other providers. She seemed unwilling, or unable, to tell us what specific speech problems she was working on with our son. It seemed that she rarely worked on specific skills at all.

I've been with the First Steps program since my child came home from the hospital. I was treated with respect and when I asked for information about developmental procedures, etc., I wasn't treated like dirt. I was given information. I don't find any improvements with the First Steps program. I say it's a VERY WONDERFUL ORGANIZATION. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK! First Steps has placed my child in a program that will prepare him for preschool and they have helped me to work on things here at home with my child.

Everyone is so willing to help meet my daughter's needs. It took a while to learn her "learning pattern". Now that we have, the results have been awesome! Thanks to First Steps and all her therapists!

Therapies are great! I'm looking forward to Kinder Musik being included in First Steps coverage for my child. Also looking forward to pre-school (and music).

We would like to thank each and everyone who make these services possible. Without the information and help from First Steps, some things would be almost next to impossible in our child's development. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts! God bless!

ALL information should be kept confidential!

Thank you. My children were premature and had developmental delays but weren't really "special need." However, we know another family with a child with many problems and they too think that First Steps was wonderful.

Our service coordinator has been wonderful for both of our sons. Keep up the great work!

Service coordinator never contacted us after the initial screening yet still received billing statements. The physical therapist was very nice but missed appointments without calling. We don't really feel that she did anything to help our daughter's development. We believe she developed at her own pace.

First Steps has been a saving grace for our child. As frightened parents going into the program, all involved helped alleviate our concerns and put the best plan in place. My only suggestion would be more publicity/public information. Most people I tell have never even heard of such a service.

I am very pleased with First Steps, however, it was not a timely process. After the initial intake meeting, it took a while to get everything arranged. I was told the coordinator was extremely busy. I feel time is precious when you have a child who needs services. Everything is going great now. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to give my opinion.

Keep First Steps around. Try to get involved with younger parents that have a child or children with special needs. They may not know how good of a program that this is. Thanks for being a part of our life!

Without First Steps, my child would not be enjoying the success that she is in her development. It has been an invaluable service. Thank you!

Don't stop at age three if the child still needs one-on-one therapy! Other than that, I can't say enough wonderful things about this program. Thank you!

We have been thrilled with the professionalism, timeliness of services, and quality of therapists we have used. The home visits make treatment possible that we would otherwise have to limit.

We have no choice of therapists in our county! If you don't get along with those that are available, your child goes without therapy.

Our service coordinator was a great service coordinator.

First Steps has been a wonderful help for our child. I hate to think where we would be without their assistance.

The services provided are a tremendous help to our family. What a terrific program for all children!

I think the money spent for a service coordinator is a waste. I received just as good service dealing with the Bureau of Special Health Care Needs. My service coordinator doesn't follow through if I have a question. I have to get back to her to get my answers. She gets paid for this and so I feel that it's her job to take care of my concerns.

Prior to having a child in need of First Step's services, I was an ECSE teacher and, therefore, I'm very familiar with the process involved in obtaining services. Had this not been the case, it would have been very easy not to receive services in a timely manner. The experiences with the intake coordinators were sub-standard. In addition to not receiving meetings within time compliance, I was also mailed the IFSPs of four children in with my child's initial IFSP information. This enormous breech of confidentiality appears to have had little to no consequence to the person whose fault it was. My child has extremely minimal needs for intervention and I am elated with her occupational and physical therapists. My service coordinator is excellent and very timely. My contacts with First Steps has been very disappointing. I am happy to discuss any of the above comments and would look forward to the opportunity to do so. Thank you.

Our therapists are wonderful! They have helped our family through a lot.

I couldn't be more pleased with First Steps. It's really helping our preemie twins to catch up with their peers!

The current speech therapist and the Audiology center are outstanding. However, The first speech therapist I feel was unprofessional and questionable in her qualifications. The service coordinator arranged to change her when I contacted her. The agency may need a better evaluation of its therapists.

Your staff has been wonderful to work with. From the intake specialist to our coordinator and, finally, our speech therapist. They have done a fantastic job helping my child overcome a speech delay. Thanks so much.

The only complaint we have is that we never hear from the service coordinator except once a year when it is time for our yearly review. She is also kind of hard to get in touch with. Otherwise, we have had a wonderful experience with the program. Thank you.

Less paperwork.

I believe the program is wonderful and that it's continuation to help other families is never jeopardized.

I was/am very pleased with First Steps. When all this first started, I expected a lot of bureaucracy and that I was going to have to make a lot of phone calls to get some action. But, after that initial phone call, First Steps was so proactive. I heard from the therapists so quickly too. It is a testament to tax money going to a good cause.

I found out about First Steps only through Parents as Teachers. I had already started speech through a therapist at a clinic. My doctor didn't mention the First Steps program. This program has been a huge blessing. We couldn't have afforded these services on our own.

I feel that my son is making great progress. But, if he is doing too well for continued services, then he will lose the help that he needs. Therefore, doing too well might hinder him from further help. He might be punished for making progress too fast, and in the end, will be left behind.

The only complaint is the several months we waited to be started on the First Steps process. The therapy services are great! Thank you! Our therapists are excellent therapists.

I think service providers that are on the Matrix, but are either unable to provide services or are unreliable, should be REMOVED from the Matrix. This has kept my child from getting the (speech) therapy she needs!

We are still learning about our child's abilities and disabilities to access his needs. It affects how the family works and plays. I would not consider our family normal right now. We are striving for routine and consistency daily.

Although service coordinators are skilled at arranging services, I am not sure they are skilled enough in recognizing/suggesting disability specific therapies. Seems they should have a background in therapy themselves...not just bureaucracy.

Some therapists overlap in their care and I have not seen a whole lot of help with my boy (some, but not what I expected). I don't think it was worth all my time. I may continue but probably not with current therapists. Our area lacks in therapist options.

We were very unhappy with the First Steps speech/language therapist we picked. She didn't work well with my two-year-old. Since we changed therapists, my son has improved significantly.

The only complaint I have is I thought the coordinator is supposed to check in and I haven't heard from her since the IFSP meeting. Otherwise, the program is terrific.

We were receiving services. When we moved, we got to keep our feeding therapist because she worked in Missouri. Also, she is the one who helped me get into First Steps. I'm very satisfied. All I want to say is thank you for having good people that work for you guys. I couldn't ask for more help.